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STEPHEN THE BLACK



CAROLINE H. PEMBERTON



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Stephen the Black

Handwritten:
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BY

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Author of "Your Little Brother James."

PHILADELPHIA

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*“ Look not upon me because I am black,
Because the sun hath looked upon me !
My mother’s children were angry with me ;
They made me the keeper of the vineyards ;
But mine own vineyard have I not kept.”*

—SONG OF SOLOMON.

Stephen the Black

CHAPTER I

ONE Sunday morning in April, Wesley Anderson sat as usual before the door of his cabin under the shade of a fragrant China-berry tree. A hazy cloud of gnats which shared with him the sweet odors and the pleasant shade did not disturb his meditations. This black field hand of an Alabama plantation was enjoying an hour's retrospection, much as a New England farmer enjoys his weekly newspaper. The events of the past thirty-three years lay open before him, and he recalled them deliberately, as one reads from a newspaper the occurrences of the past week.

These memories were made up mostly of national events, in which his own personality was lost in the great issues of American history. His long, black, knotty hand clasped a

worn and greasy Bible firmly by the cover, and the other lay spread out on its open page, as if to draw inspiration through contact. But Wesley's eyes were fixed on the great expanse of ploughed land that lay before him, nearly all of it bearing the marks of his own toil. The impress of his plodding feet in the wet earth was observable at close range, for they had trudged behind the plough immediately after a recent heavy rain. His eyes were gazing into space and saw not the field, or the deep furrows, or the tiny, sprouting leaves of the cotton plant just beginning to show between the furrows, or the fringe of dark woods beyond, which met a range of soft white clouds on the edge of the horizon.

He saw, instead, soldiers in blue and grey; dashing horsemen, fire, flame, smoke and ashes; houses burning, women and children fleeing, while screams, groans, cheers, curses, bugle calls and merry marches rang in his ears.

With solemn enjoyment he recalled many an incident in his personal experience. He remembered his week of terrible anxiety in the

swamp back of "Old Massa's" plantation, where he lay concealing twelve mules by his master's orders while Wilson's troops were passing through the country like avenging angels. This military event is officially recorded as a vigorous raid planned by General Sherman during the siege of Atlanta, but in the annals of the blacks of that neighborhood it has crystallized into folk-lore as "Wilson's rage,"—that hero having been unable, it was supposed, to suppress any longer the violence of his splendid, righteous anger.

Wesley recalled the day when he left the swamp to get fodder for his mules, and met a scouting party of Union soldiers as he was climbing a fence that separated his master's fields from the public road.

A short colloquy took place, every word of which was engraved on his memory. Although he had repeated it many hundred times since, not a word nor an accent had been changed from the original dialogue:

"Hallo, John, you know the roads between here and Selma?"

"Yes, sah, I know de roads off dis way for twenty mile front o' yer."

"Who lives in yonder white house?"

"Massa Anderson, sah."

"Who's at home there?"

"Dere ain't supposed to be nobody dere but us niggers,—dere ain't supposed to be, sah."

"I asked you who *is* there. Speak out like a man."

"Massa Anderson's dere, sah, when he ain't hidin' from de conscripts or de Yanks."

"What is he, a Reb?"

"He ain't neither Reb nor Yank; he hide from bofe, sah. He don't want de Yanks to take his cattle an' his niggers, and he don't want de Rebs to take hisself and make him fight. He just want to be let alone, sah, until dis crule wah be over."

"I'll leave him to take care of his skin, but you come with me, my man, and tell me some things I want to know about the lay of the land ahead. Got a mule?"

"I kin git one, sah, but—Massa Anderson he tole me to keep his mules whar dey be."

“Get your mule and be quick. I don’t want to hear what Massa Anderson said. He ain’t your master now. You’re a free man. Get your mule and join me over there by that little bridge. Be quick.”

It was thus that freedom had come to Wesley, informally and incidentally, as if merely to suit the convenience of a military detachment that happened to be passing by. With the rest of his race he had hoped for freedom when the war first broke out, but it had never entered his head that this mighty change was to be brought about by a few carelessly uttered words of an obscure Union officer commanding a mere handful of men. News of Lincoln’s Proclamation had traveled slowly in the cotton-growing states, and reached the Anderson plantation more as a rumor than a statement of fact. Wesley had often pictured Lincoln with arms raised to heaven pronouncing the wonderful words:

“By the grace of God these bonds are broken,—you are now free!”

But that any one but Lincoln had the right

to utter such words he did not believe. Nevertheless obedience to the authority of the hour was an old habit of mind, and Wesley obeyed the young officer as he had obeyed his poor old skulking master, but with a much more joyful heart. He accepted him as a new master and served him devotedly, though still convinced at heart that freedom had not yet come.

Old Wesley, sitting under the shade of the China-berry tree, thirty-three years afterward, remembered distinctly all his ignorant surmises on this subject, and with a half smile, followed closely the line of thought which had led him from incredulity into the full knowledge of his freedom. The consciousness of it had dawned upon him when he found himself standing one day in a soldier's uniform.

As the old negro recalled the scenes of his military life, he smiled proudly, and gazed with a rapt expression at the distant horizon. His soldier's life had been brief. It did not begin until the last year of the war. It in-

cluded one terrible battle,—during which the blacks were mowed down like grass all around him;—some long, dusty marches, some horridly sickening sights; it was more confused than any other set of reminiscences, but it ended in an exalted climax.

The last scene in the glorious panorama of memory which for one hour obscured the ugly reality of a poor field-hand's dreary existence, was the entry of the black troops into the city of Richmond. Wesley now beheld himself seated on a high, bony, long-necked, brown mare, surrounded by innumerable black faces looking still darker in the shadow of their soldier's caps. With gleaming eyes they gazed in awe-struck triumph at the vacant streets and burning houses, to the right and left, from which the owners had fled. No white face did he remember on those streets, but from doorways and windows, astonished, rapturous black countenances peered forth, while black hands were raised to heaven and awe-stricken, trembling voices chanted praises to the Lord Jesus.

At that moment, Wesley had seen what he thought was a vision of the near future. He saw his whole race freed, uplifted, glorified. He saw his children and his children's children occupying positions of honor and responsibility. He beheld them reading the white man's books, attending the white man's school, and reading aloud to each other the thoughts of the illustrious white man across the ocean,—that Mr. Shakespeare, for instance, of whom the white folks were always talking,—doubtless they were even to read Mr. Shakespeare's books aloud to each other and to their children! It had been whispered in his ear once by a very knowing housemaid that this Mr. Shakespeare had written a book about a black, for she had seen his picture in her master's library.

This book and all the other wonders of the world were to be within the reach of his people. They had reached the "promised land"; all behind them lay misery, degradation and suffering; all before them lay honor, happiness and prosperity, held securely within

the protecting arms of the good Lincoln, and the mighty armies of the North. Their patient faithfulness had won at last the love of heaven. Looking over his horse's head, Wesley beheld the apotheosis of the black race; they were to be as gods in comparison with what they had been. Not by their own might, but by the hand of the Lord Jesus, were they now to be raised up, and everything was to be as it had never been before!

Wesley gave a deep sigh, for the climax was reached in his reminiscent dream. A dreary waste of years lay between those dramatic scenes and to-day, during which the sublime hope of his race had burned feebly and without enthusiasm.

The prophetic spirit which had seemed to stir his soul on that day when the Union army took possession of Richmond must have been a false spirit, or at least a very shortsighted one. It gave no hint of the desert of grinding, unremunerative toil through which he and his people had been plodding since the war. Ignorance enveloped them

still, as in the days of slavery. They worked steadily and uncomplainingly, but only a very few of them had land, houses, money, or education. They lived in the same miserable cabins; they toiled for the benefit of others; they reaped not what they sowed.

With trouble in his eyes, Wesley scanned the distant horizon for an answer to the question which he now propounded to himself, timidly and with much humility,—why should the Lord Jesus have taken such pains to free his people, if they were not worthy of a better fate than this? Why so much shedding of blood,—ay, and of the white man's blood too,—if his people were not to be lifted up after all?

Far away indeed seemed those beneficent beings whom he had once known and revered under the name of "Yanks." How they had rushed down from their mountain-tops and their magnificent golden cities (Wesley had always pictured them as living on mountain-tops and in cities like the new Jerusalem) to gather up his people by the hun-

dreds and thousands as they marched through the plantations of the South,—not only the men who were able to work, and fight, but the helpless women and children as well. They scooped them all up as they went marching through; the word was always “Come along,” to young and old, babies and little children, old men and old women. A guard of young fellows marched back of them, and the great army ahead of them, and the cannon beside them, and thus those heroes went through the country they had conquered, “setting his people free!”

It did not occur to Wesley that this was a measure of war and a political necessity. To his unsophisticated mind it was pure benevolence. And they did not leave them to starve either, he reflected. He remembered the great camp-fires of the Union army, over which had hung pots full of fragrant messes, and others full of steaming coffee—all for his people!

“Dey acted like dey loved us in dose days,” mused Wesley, in his perplexity, as he rubbed a black finger up and down his forehead to

smooth out the creases, "but I reckon dey'se forgot our black faces 'cause we ain't slaves no mo' and dere ain't no more crule wah to bring 'em down dis yere way. We's in de wilderness now; dat's whar we be,—not in bondage, praise de Lord, but in de wilderness, whar de chillen o' Israel pass forty year arter dey come out o' bondage; ya-as, dat's so—forty year."

Wesley began to count on his fingers the years following the war, for in this calculation there was abundant food for thought. He rubbed his eyes and smiled to himself as his simple mind seized on what seemed to him an extraordinary analogy. He reflected that there would be an opportunity that afternoon to expound this new scriptural view to many of his neighbors and friends when they assembled at the turn of the road in the little frame building that served as schoolhouse and church. There would be many present who were known to be chronic grumblers and were never weary of chanting their discontent in and out of season. Some were

fond of saying that they might just as well be slaves again; they didn't have to work any harder in the old days than they did now. Wesley counted these as lazy fellows, but there were many earnest, plodding souls against whom this reproach could not be brought, and who like himself had moments of profound discouragement over their own prospects and the future of their race. One of these, a frail, gentle old man, had ventured so far as to whisper once to Wesley his soul-benumbing doubt that the Lord Jesus in His heart really could not care as much for His black children as He did for His white ones.

“'Pears like He kinder feel 'shamed o' Himself once in awhile for neglectin' us, and He make amend all to once,—and den He forgit us agin and not look arter us for anudder long spell widout somefin' happen to remind Him,—an' den He feel shame ag'in, and stir Hisself up real hard to do somefin' great; but I 'spec' it do cause Him a heap o' trouble to keep His black chillen in mind,—what you tink o' dat, Brudder Anderson?”

But Wesley had not agreed with this view, and he now felt that he could effectively relieve his doubting brother's mind as to the Lord's intentions regarding His black children. He determined to spare no pains to make his argument clear to his hearers by fortifying himself with numerous texts and much prayerful study of the subject beforehand. He turned over the pages of his Bible to the book of Exodus, which he knew contained the narrative he wanted, but hard as he rubbed his spectacles, long as he gazed at the black letters on the page, they refused to deliver up the message of the text.

"De chillen'll read it to me, dey'll be back soon, I reckon," he murmured, patiently.

Raising his eyes, he was able to discern two slender figures climbing the fence that separated the cotton-field from the thick woods against the horizon.

CHAPTER II

A BOY of fifteen and a girl of eighteen came slowly into view carrying a bucket of water between them. Wesley observed them thoughtfully. Their slight, thinly-clad figures were sharply outlined against the background of dull earth and cloudless sky. Their clothing looked colorless and their faces black, but as they drew near it was noticeable that while the boy was dark-skinned, the girl's face was shadowed by a large sunbonnet, and as she lifted her head to speak to her grandfather, the young face in the recess of the bonnet appeared fair, rosy, and beautiful. A waving lock of black hair blew across her temples; she pushed it back with a hand that, while it was browned by exposure to the wind and sun, was to all appearances the hand of a white woman. The grandfather of these two strangely assorted children of one mother—each apparently representing a separate race—

eyed them with more than his usual gentleness, though his words indicated a feeble effort at reproof.

"You hadn't ought to wear yer good shoes to git water, Tressy. De wet'll spile 'em, chile."

"Wet ain't spiled 'em yet," answered the girl, examining each shoe, solicitously.

"Dat's 'cause I done tote de pail all de way," remarked her brother, opening his big black eyes upon her with an air of reproach.

"Tressy, she don't look whar she go, grandpap. Yer mought tink she war in love, so yer might, by de way she's been actin' o' late. Says she ain't agwine to skule no more. What yer tink o' dat, now, grandpap? Tressy don't 'preciate de 'vantage what a education give yer, do she, grandpap?"

"I ain't said I didn't want to go to skule no more," cried the girl, plaintively. "I said I didn't want to go no more to nigger skule; that's what I said, an' no more I do, 'cause no nigger can learn me what he don't know hisself. What's use in a big girl like me settin'

down aside a heap o' little chillen and hearkenin' to a ignorant nigger showin' off hisself? I kin read as well as that teacher we had las' winter."

Lemuel rolled his eyes. "My! Tressy! Yo' dunno yer mul'cation tables!"

"I know 'em as well as teacher. He dunno know how many time nine go into sixty-tree till you tole him yo'self when he was doin' that long sum on er blackboard afore de county superintendent—an' him mos' killin' hisself a-laughin' at de kind o' skule de niggers war a-keepin' up!"

"He forgot hisself, I reckon," interposed her grandfather, hastily. "Yer mustn't look down and despise yer perfessors, chillen; dat perfessor, I dare say, was all struck down in a heap,—obfustocated, as de sayin' is, by de presence o' dat county superintendent—a gran' white gentleman come to look him up and see if he war obstructin' de youth o' de country like he should. It war like to make him skairt and narvous, and I 'spec' he done forget all he knowed."

“Well, he ain’t comin’ back, anyway, sence he been sick,” said Lemuel. “He’s gwine to work in a hotel, and dey’s got anudder hired a’ready to finish out de term; so dere ain’t no fit ’cuse fo’ you not gwine to skule no mo’, Tressy.”

“Don’t argufy, chillen; yer larn yerselves nuffin’ with argufyin’. Set down yer pail, Tressy, an’ come an’ stan’ by me an’ read out o’ dis yere book. Lemme see how much you’s improve’ in yer readin’, or if you’s been backslidin’.”

Theresa handed the bucket of water to her brother, and, tilting her sunbonnet far back from her forehead, leaned over her grandfather’s chair, placing one hand on his shoulder while with the other she turned over the leaves and found the chapter he wanted,—pointing her finger to each verse and drawing it slowly down the page as she read.

Lemuel had deposited the pail hastily within the cabin, and now stood listening with a critical ear to his sister’s reading. The opening verses of the sixteenth chapter of Exodus

fell smoothly enough from Theresa's lips. Her soft voice began listlessly enough at first, but the dramatic murmurings of the children of Israel had always charmed her fancy, and she read on with much expression.

Her active-minded brother found something suspicious, however, in the unusual nimbleness of Theresa's tongue. He knew the limit of her accomplishments, and just where her careless eye and too quick imagination would cause her to stumble. He stepped forward and looked over her shoulder, following with his eye her swiftly moving finger.

"Why, Tressy, what you 'bout? You's p'intin' one place an' readin' t'other! She's jes' recitin'—dat's what she doin', grandpap! Recitin' ain't readin'," he cried, excitedly.

Wesley pulled the Bible from the girl's hand and looked at her—his ancient, black countenance full of distress.

"Chile, you gwine deceive yer ole gran'dad, 'cause he can't read hisself, an' has to mak' pretend? Ain't it bad enough for a' ole man like me to mak' pretend widout you's neglectin'

yer opportunities like dis? Dese opportunities is pore 'nough, I grant yer,—but dey's de berry bes' I bin able to afford, an' I's worked soon and late and scrimped myself and hired hands for ter pick cotton an' to hoe, so's to keep you an' yer brudder out o' de field an' into skule while it last. Fo' de Lord, I done widout 'baccy dese tree years 'count o' skulin' you two,—done widout a ox I might a had, jes' fo' you's sake. Now you go deceive yer ole gran'dad and pertend you's readin' when you's only recitin'! Go 'way, Tressy, I nebber tink you such a deceivin' piece—like dat." His quivering voice ceased almost in a sob. Quickly Theresa clasped one arm around his neck while she pressed her young face close to his black wrinkled cheek.

"I *warn't* deceivin' yer! I kin read, most as good as that, but I jes didn't want to take the trouble. Lemme sing to you," she cried, soothingly. "What shall I sing yer, gran'dad?"

The dark old face became suddenly illu-

mined; his eye kindled with its old-time enthusiasm,—he began to beat time rhythmically with his hand.

“Sing fo’m de beginnin’—de beginnin’ ob de gran’ hope fo’ de colored folks.”

He drew her down to a stool at his feet, where she sat gracefully, her scant calico skirt barely covering her ankles. Her sunbonnet had fallen off her head, and her crisp black hair displayed itself in two heavy plaits looped up with a piece of faded ribbon. The two faces bending closely together,—one fair and lovely, the other black as ebony,—showed a striking similarity of profile. Wesley Anderson’s features reminded one of the figures sometimes seen on Egyptian monuments, and the low brow, the arch of the long nose, the small ears and quivering nostrils, were reproduced in his granddaughter’s fair face. The family likeness repeated itself further in Lemuel’s dark features, but although he possessed his sister’s pleasing regularity of outline, the effect was obscured by the thick brown skin through which no blush could

make itself seen, and by the crowning racial mark of tightly curling black wool that grew so low on his forehead.

Theresa lifting a tremulous soprano, began —

“My mudder has gone to jour-*ney* away —

In de kingdom, in de kingdom, in de king-*dom* away,”—

her voice rising and dwelling on each accented syllable with the intense pathos of the old plantation singers. She could reproduce exactly the cry of a childlike race, in whose heart were mingled pain and patience with a long suppressed but never-to-be-extinguished hope. Lemuel joined in the chorus, and after they had sung several more melodies in the same approved, heart-breaking style—each one touching the long-drawn-out, high note of weary waiting—he said impatiently,—

“We’se troo wid de gran’ mis’ry, gran’dad; let’s go on wid de little mis’ry; dose mis’ry songs mak’ me feel bad,—all broke up inside.” He laid his hand over his cotton shirt and looked up into his grandfather’s face with a woe-begone expression. The old man hastily

began another chant, waving both hands dramatically:

“De Lord spoke to Moses from Sinai mountain-top;
Said ‘Moses, lead my people until I bid you stop,’”—

and they sang with great spirit through a succession of verses, until Wesley, with eyes snapping and feet going, suddenly checked himself to whisper in piercing accents—
“*Oberseer crossin’ de hedge,—look out, ma boys, look out—*” and instantly they dropped their voices to

“Swing low, sweet chariot, swing low;
I don’t want to leave me behind.”

“Moses war a gran’ ole *suspeecious* character in dem days—same as Abe Lincoln; de two o’ ’em was hated like de berry ole debbil,” chuckled Wesley, as the children paused for breath. “Now, we’s all alone, ag’in;—de war’s begun; ole massa’s two sons is off to Richmond, an’ here we be down in de field hoein’ an’ diggin’—so come on, boys”—and with a great shout they all three sang—

“Slavery chain done broke at last,
De Lord done set us free——”

until Wesley, in another dramatic whisper indicating the approach of the suspicious overseer, changed the song to

“Stay in de field, stay in de field!
Until de war be ended;
Mine eyes are turned to de Hebbenly gate,
I’ll keep on my way or I’ll be too late,
Until de war be ended.”

The children sang this pious injunction with a sanctimonious air as directed. As they were getting tired and Wesley himself was already hoarse from his vocal exertions, they skipped to a wonderful, martial melody, with relief that they had at last reached this happy climax which they repeated several times as a chorus:

“Dey look like men, dey look like men,
Dey look like men o’ war!
All armed an’ dressed in uniform,
Dey look like men o’ war!”

As they ended each stanza, Theresa and Lemuel raised their hands in the air, and their grandfather waved his bandanna handkerchief, in greeting of an imaginary procession of black troopers.

"'Pears like dey on'y *looked* like dey was men," observed Lemuel in an injured tone after they had admired the procession in silence for some minutes. "What's de good o' dem sodgers not sayin' dey *was* men? What was dey feared for, gran'dad?"

Wesley straightening his bent figure, answered with dignity,

"Dey *knowed* dey was men,—dey knowed it well 'nough; dose lion-hearted fellows was feared o' nuffin',—but dey was considerin' de feelin's o' de white folks—an' dey suspicioned it mought kinder hurt dere feelin's ef dey sang out too bold 'long side o' dem Yanks. Ain't I tellin' yer allus, chillen, we-uns has to consider de feelin's o' de white folks? Ef dey be Yanks or ef dey be Rebs,—it mak' no diff'ence."

Theresa shrugged her shoulders at this explanation but Lemuel accepted it with a good grace, murmuring, "dat so," in a subdued tone. He was sitting on the ground examining his bare toes with great interest, but presently he raised his head to say in a dismal

snuffle, "Dere's a nigger down on de Benson plantation, he say we-uns is all a-goin' to be slaves ag'in, fo' long—dat what he say."

"It ain't true,—we-uns 'ill die first!" cried Theresa, rising and flashing her eyes about with the air of a tragedy queen.

"Dat so—we-uns'll die first," repeated Lemuel in the voice of his race,—a voice strangely acquiescent,—mournful, yet touched with faith, and so redeemed from fatalism. His eyes did not flash, but opened very wide in a prolonged stare at his toes, which he continued to examine with the same air of absorbed interest.

His grandfather, raising his trembling hands, was about to begin an inspiring invocation to the Lord Jesus, when all three looked up at the sound of a horse's hoofs on the hard clay road that wound through the cotton-field.

A young, handsome white man, neatly and elegantly dressed and riding a well-groomed black horse, drew rein almost at their feet. He had galloped up unobserved until his horse's forefeet almost touched Wesley's old

boots. The little group drew back startled, at which the young rider laughed gaily.

"Came to tell you, Wesley, that father says you better come early next Saturday, and he'll give you first choice of all the goods. He wants you to help him, anyways."

"Dese is berry hard times, Mr. Ralph. Dat mortgage las' year done eat up all de profit. We's got to live down most to nuffin', dis year. Folks say price o' meal's gone up—bacon too."

The old darkey stood with uncovered head; his forehead was seamed and scarred with lines of care. The Bible had fallen to the ground, and the long, horny hands of the field-laborer were clasped together nervously. The children had risen to their feet and backed away to the cabin-door at the sudden approach of the horseman. Theresa mounting the low steps stood leaning against the unpainted door-post which was almost the same color as her faded calico dress. Her bonnet hung from her hands by its cotton strings. Her head drooped; her eyes were

downcast, but a rich color was rising to her cheeks. She stood motionless, with her eyes fixed on the steps.

Young Aikens disclaimed any knowledge of his father's arrangements in tones that were good-naturedly reassuring. His father would make it all right, he said. He always did do the best he could for his tenants, even at his own loss. The land was poor enough, and cotton was bringing only five cents a pound, but it would be all right, he knew. No tenant could find a better landlord than his father. He always considered the tenant's interests as well as his own. He knew they had to live too.

The young man's eyes wandered as he spoke until they fell on the motionless figure of the young girl in the low doorway. He glanced toward her several times during his little homily on his father's virtues as a landlord. His eyes seemed to entreat her to come forward, but she remained as before, mute and downcast. Lemuel moved close to the trunk of the China-berry tree, and fixed his inquisitive eyes on the white man's face.

The visitor asked the boy's name and age, and his relationship to Theresa.

"What an absurd contrast!" he exclaimed, laughing and looking again at Theresa. Lemuel shifted his position, rolled the whites of his eyes toward the visitor, and dug a long toe into the sandy soil.

"All de white blood in de fam'ly gone to make up Tressy—leff me all black," he explained, with a melancholy sigh.

Young Aikens laughed heartily, and his eyes again entreated Theresa to come nearer. A dimple appeared in her cheek, but she refused to stir, shaking her head slightly. The smile in Ralph Aikens' eyes died out quickly: he turned his horse away reminding Wesley again with a business-like air that he must be sure to call on his father early if he wanted first choice. He withdrew a few yards and suddenly stopped, wheeling his horse around.

"Tell your girl to bring me a glass of water," he called out in a tone of command.

Wesley turned to look for his grandchild, but she had already disappeared into the cabin

to get the water. Presently she came forth, holding a broken goblet in her hand. She carried it carefully toward the horseman, walking with such an even step that not a drop was spilled as she moved swiftly toward him. He took it from her hand, drank a little water, and threw the rest away. His bold blue eyes looked down deliberately into her frightened dark ones. Her left hand was on the bridle of his horse, and she held out the other for the empty glass. The fairness of the upturned face filled the young man with soft emotion. His eyes became less bold as he stooped down and said in a low voice:

“Little one, don’t be afraid of me; I want you to come to my house this evening. My mother will let you wait on table. Tell your grandfather she wants you and will pay you well, and do you come through the woods about three o’clock. It’s the pleasantest way. Will you come?”

“Yes,” whispered the girl.

In another moment he was gone, and

Theresa, pale to the lips, pulled her sunbonnet well over her head to conceal her face.

"I reckon I'll go wait on Mis' Aikens' company this evenin'," she said, with an effort at carelessness, but not able quite to suppress the thrill that gave her young Southern voice a deeper note than usual.

"Ef yer don't keer for gwine to church, I reckon yer might as well 'blige Mis' Aikens," her grandfather assented, dreamily. He was again absorbed in a study of the Israelites in the wilderness.

CHAPTER III

THE first year following the close of the war, Wesley Anderson and his fellows had worked for their former master on terms of mutual concession. As there was no money to pass from hand to hand, the basis of settlement was of course the cotton crop. The master was to keep nine-tenths, and his former slaves agreed to divide the remaining tenth among themselves. As there were not less than twenty-five negro families to participate in this division of the tenth, it did not prove very remunerative. They had all they could do to keep alive that year: and the master remarked grimly, "Fill up your stomach with freedom, boys," when he saw their disappointed looks and heard the apprehensive murmur that the supply of food received in exchange for the cotton would not last them until the next crop was grown and picked. In

a panic of dismal foreboding, every family moved off the plantation; and some made better terms with neighbors.

A few years later, an agent from the North induced Wesley to place all of his little savings in one of the Freedmen's banks, which he did joyfully, after being fully persuaded that the bank originated with the "Yanks," and was controlled by those beneficent beings. It swallowed up his first earnings, and never a penny came back to him or to any of the dusky children of the Black Belt. A cry of grief went from plantation to plantation when it was learned definitely that the banks had gone to pieces, and the first earnings of the freedmen, amounting to thousands of dollars, had disappeared from the face of the earth.

Months of bewildering discussion failed to solve the mystery of that misplaced trust. There were various theories advanced. Some held that an inscrutable Providence permitted "mean Yanks" as well as mean niggers to walk this earth. The good Yanks were probably reduced in number since the war,—the

bad ones having dodged bullets with the cunning agility that distinguishes the wicked. But Wesley was of the opinion that the Yanks reckoned they had a claim on those earnings, and if they thought so, why of course they had. The other view prevailed more generally, however, and many a sigh went up for the poor simple Yanks who lay under the grass-grown battlefields. If they had lived, they would have seen to it that the negro was not robbed of the first pennies he had ever earned by free labor. It was thus that these untutored minds strove vainly to account for a lapse in the national conscience which permitted this wrong to go unrighted.

There was not enough money on hand after this hard experience to buy food during the year, and they only managed to live at all by borrowing heavily from their landlords. The terms: laborer—employer—servant—master—workman,—having an ominous, uncertain sound, recalled the degradation of slavery, and were therefore avoided by both sides in this new, great, coöperative experiment between

those who had never labored, and those who had never earned.

The timid, apprehensive freedmen argued that to accept food and clothing from the landowner as in the days of slavery, might involve a hideous forfeiture of liberty; so to make themselves secure, each field-hand affixed his mark to a document declaring the supplies to be a loan for which he agreed to pay a ponderous interest until the cotton was sold, the same to be deducted from his share when the day of settlement came in the fall. This little formality eased the minds of the perplexed laborers, and their former masters talked pleasantly over it among themselves. The price of labor rose. Each man cultivated as many acres as he could till, with the aid of his wife and family, and half of the crop that he gathered was soon his instead of a tenth, but it was heavily mortgaged in advance to pay for the year's supplies, and as the price of labor rose the interest on those mortgages rose also.

Meanwhile, that mysterious account of food supply, mortgage, and interest, which existed

between Wesley and his landlord, developed always a deficit on the side of the tenant whenever Wesley took upon himself to move without the consent of his landlord. Some cherished possession had then to be left behind to balance the account, and though Wesley shrewdly guessed that the deficit grew out of the landlord's disgust at losing an industrious and profitable field-hand, he could whisper this doubt only to those who, like himself, were powerless to suggest a remedy.

During those thirty years of unceasing toil, many changes came into Wesley's domestic life. His wife died; then his only son, and his elder daughter. Evaline, the younger daughter, left him to act as housekeeper for a white man of good birth and considerable means. After an absence of five years, she returned, leading by the hand two little children, a dark-skinned, woolly-headed boy and a fair girl, three years his senior. She had learned how to read while in the city, and spent much of her time teaching the children from a primer.

The one-roomed log-cabin was not spacious enough to receive these outcasts without overcrowding, but nobody's sense of decorum was disturbed by the fact that three generations occupied the only room in the house. No romance was invented to account for the existence of the children. They went by their mother's name, and if any one asked who was their father, the answer—"He was a white man," was considered definite enough to satisfy the most curious. The situation was not unusual. Evaline used to pick cotton occasionally by the side of another woman whose children were referred in the same vague way to the anonymous parentage of another race.

"Mammy," said one of these little children one day, in very distinct tones, "wha' fo' de Lord Jesus mak' so many colors o' us an' only one fo' de pore white man?"

Evaline, hanging her head, had dragged her children quickly away from the small questioner, but the other woman only laughed as she jerked the light-skinned child off his feet and set him playfully on a heaping basket of

cotton. She kissed him in a passion of admiration because he was fairer than herself.

Evaline had been unable to adapt herself to the life of an obscure field-hand after certain strange, brightly colored experiences had deepened her knowledge of a world which had now forsaken her, but on which her mind constantly dwelt. She pined and drooped until the cotton fell from her nerveless fingers, and the basket came back empty from the field. The interior of the log-cabin became a sick-room with no skilled preparations to alleviate suffering, with no other ministering angel than that weary, bent, field-hand, who cooked the meals, scrubbed the floor, washed and dressed his grandchildren, and tended his dying daughter between working hours with a breathless, prayerful devotion.

After the death of Evaline, the old man was sufficiently experienced to take entire charge of the children, and life went on in the log-cabin—or rather in the series of log-cabins, for at that time they were always moving,—as monotonously as before. Every cabin they moved

into was exactly like the cabin they had left, sometimes a little more out of repair and sometimes a little less. The vast sea of ploughed land surrounding the cabins looked just about the same when seen from one point of view as from another. The only variety was in the season of the year. In the spring, the outlook was that of dull earth and blue sky: later it was a green sameness, and then a pink, yellow, and olive sameness: and finally a snowfall of ripe bursting cotton, in which the men and women stood waist high and the little children were entirely lost to view as they picked by the side of their elders, closed the circle; the last cotton snowflake vanished into the bag of the gleaners, and the bare, brown earth was exposed again in all its furrowed nakedness.

Wesley had signed a new lease the year my story opens, and in February had mortgaged the year's crop in advance with the understanding that he was to draw what he needed from time to time and pay interest on the whole sum from the first of January. So far

he had drawn but little on this account, and the few rations he had already obtained were of the poorest and cheapest kind—some meal, molasses, and pork for daily use, with a few pounds of tea, coffee, and brown sugar. After long pondering over the conditions of his existence, he had at last concluded that it was wiser to draw as little in advance as possible. He owned two thin black pigs, and he had obtained permission from Colonel Aikens to plant several rows of corn, sweet potatoes, beans and onions,—besides the inevitable greens,—back of his cabin; these he was watching tenderly, hoeing them carefully every night on his return from the field. On the whole, he felt that his chances of coming out ahead in the fall were brighter, for could they not live on the green vegetables with a little pork during several weeks of summer, and would not every mouthful raised from the soil save something from the proceeds of the cotton crop?

The little pigs were the pride of his heart; he often denied himself a second helping at

table that there might be more for the pigs. He knew everything about cotton-growing, but not much about pigs, potatoes and beans. When he had first begun to plant his little garden, he had consulted all the wiseacres on the plantation, but no one could tell him just when the seeds should be buried or exactly how deep they ought to be laid in the soil. He had also sought Colonel Aikens' advice, but the landlord's conclusion was that it didn't matter much; so Wesley had selected an evening when there was a bright full moon and made his great economic experiment alone, with a prayer in his heart. If it had proved successful for himself and his fellows, cotton would no longer be king; but of course this poor field-hand saw but a very little way into the significance of his new agricultural scheme, and Colonel Aikens, it must be admitted, saw not much further.

CHAPTER IV

RALPH AIKENS about three o'clock that Sunday afternoon led his horse up the steep bank of a narrow stream (from which the horse had been drinking), instead of crossing the wooden bridge that spanned the brook just where the road entered a wood of tall pines and water oaks. He was paying very little attention to the horse which followed close to his elbow; his eyes were following the evenly shaded road overhung with interlacing boughs until it emerged into a narrow cleft of sunlight and blue sky half a mile beyond.

After entering the wood, he turned into a bridle-path covered with a soft carpet of pine needles. The pines were bare of branches for quite a distance upward, leaving an open space below with a canopy of tree-tops overhead. This gave a solemn cathedral-like aspect to the woods, and the effect was height-

ened by long strips of colorless hanging moss which swayed from the boughs of the oak trees. Unrelieved by sunlight, the sombre streamers looked a rusty black in the distance, as if Nature, in sorrow over her vanished races, had draped her trees in funereal crepe, and had forgotten to take the sad emblems down until the southern storms had torn them into shreds.

Ralph stopped beside a fallen tree, and his horse sniffed at a bunch of ferns. He jerked it away from the ferns and glanced furtively to the left. Some one was approaching; he devoted himself to hitching the animal to a young sapling. As a slender, erect figure drew near, Ralph sat down and permitted himself to turn toward it with a smile. It was Theresa, in a well-starched though faded chintz gown; her face was shadowed by the inevitable sunbonnet, but exhibited a rosy glow as she drew near. She raised her head as she stood opposite to the young man, and looked at him with an expression of undisguised adoration. Her hands were clasped

loosely together. Her dark eyes seemed to be full of light.

"Theresa, child!" he cried, holding out his hand eagerly to draw her to him. "I do admire the way you walk. Do you know, you have the step of a princess?"

"I was a-walkin' to you," the girl answered, in a low voice and without even the ghost of a smile to lighten the foolishly tender meaning of her words. Ralph was satisfied with a speech that revealed the willingness of the speaker to wear her heart upon her sleeve.

"Do you always say what you mean as neatly as that?" he asked, laughing.

She nodded, still without smiling, and drew a little nearer, but remained beyond the reach of his hand.

"I asked you to come here again because I want to have a little talk with you." (It was evident they had met here before.) "I have a great interest in you, Theresa. I want you to have everything that other girls have—other pretty girls, I mean, though I don't know any as pretty as you. I want you to have sur-

roundings suitable to your youth and beauty. I should like to see you dressed in a beautiful silk gown, Theresa, trimmed with lace and velvet, with a big hat and a curling feather drooping over your left ear; then wouldn't you look like a duchess!"

He laughed awkwardly, for the young girl was still looking at him with her air of innocent gravity.

"You shall have fine clothes and music lessons, Theresa, think of that! And you can go to the high school, too, if you want to. I am going into business in Perryville, and there I shall have a little home, where you can keep house for me, and have everything you want. Do you understand, Theresa?"

Ralph leaned forward and succeeded in taking hold of her hand. His intention was to draw her into his arms, but the young creature stood firmly on her feet and looked down into his face. Ralph, looking up into hers, was struck with the seriousness of her expression.

As she still made no answer, he went on

hurriedly in a low voice: "I trust you will do what I wish. I shall never marry any one else, and if I should—but there is no use talking about that. This union will be sacred in my eyes, and in the sight of heaven—who knows? What do you say, Theresa?"

"Am I fit to be wife o' yourn?" she asked, slowly, her low voice enunciating every word with great distinctness. She pressed her hands against her breast and drew her breath quickly.

"The law forbids marriage between the races," he answered, frowning angrily. "I am not deceiving you, Theresa. I did not make the law, but I expect to obey it, and so must you."

"But I'm white too," cried the girl, baring her wrist and holding it out to him for examination. The tears sprang to her eyes.

"My child, you are white enough to pass anywhere for a white woman,—but the only marriage possible for you is marriage with a low black man. You can escape that by putting yourself into my hands. Look here, Theresa, when you look me through with

those innocent eyes of yours, I hope you read me plainly enough. I hope you know that I respect, admire, and appreciate—your innocence. I should like to shield and protect you always: I swear to God, I should.” His voice trembled as he took hold of both her hands. He was astonished at his own agitation.

He had not expected to address such words as these to this humble daughter of a despised race, this outcast from his own race; but there was something in the girl’s face that asserted an unusual purity of nature, and his own unconsciously bowed down before it. He accepted the fact that she adored him. He knew if he merely looked at her it filled her soul with a tumult of joy. How could it be otherwise? Yet his impulses, lawless as they were, yielded an obedience to a certain mysterious charm which he could define only as innocence. It had the effect of a finely distinct personality, and the mental image of the girl ascended in his inner consciousness as if she had suddenly mounted a marble pedestal. Nevertheless, in his appeals, he had carefully

guarded himself from mentioning the name of love. According to his traditions, neither love nor marriage was possible between one of his race and one of hers. Love might very properly exist on her side, but it should not be named by him.

But Theresa had not observed the omission of this potent word, and gathered herself together to make her plea for an ideal justice. Her young heart responded to the strong emotion of the young man, expressed in his warm glance, his faltering voice, and the strong clasp of his hands on hers, rather than to his arguments or to his promises of glittering benefits in the near future.

"I know I'm a poor ig'rant girl, born and raised 'mong black folks, but I'm not black myself, Mr. Ralph. Livin' 'mongst 'em won't make me black. It won't"—she cried, freeing her hands suddenly and clasping them together—"as long as all my feelin's is white. I shouldn't dream o' lovin' you if I warn't white myself—white all through. Don't you b'lieve me?"

"I believe you are pure of heart—I believe that," answered Ralph, with tenderness.

"My mother was pure o' heart, gran'paw says; an' that's why she sees God every day like the angels. Ain't white ladies always pure o' heart?" Her face expressed a poetic rapture.

"Some of 'em," Ralph answered, with a wry smile. For a moment he looked at her silently, with increasing dismay. He felt an aversion toward his former scheme, but Theresa in her innocence helped him toward it. She began again shyly:

"Gran'paw will let me go to you when I tell him a white man loves me because I'm white and is gwine to liff me out o' the hands o' the blacks an' put me where I b'long, and that God will marry us, but not the law. Ain't that what you said?"

Ralph flushed. "It was something like that, but,—oughtn't you to be afraid o' me, Theresa?" he asked, with a faint, newly-born sense of shame within him.

"I'm not," cried the young creature, with a

look of joy. "It don't matter about the law, if God approves what we do, does it? Gran'-pap says the law's often wrong."

"So it is," cried her hero, casting aside his scruples. He extended his arms and drew her toward him. He pushed back her sun-bonnet and kissed her, looking at her delicate face with intense admiration.

"Why do you wear that ugly thing?" he whispered. Theresa caught the loosened strings and pulled the bonnet firmly on her head. She tore herself away quickly, and leaned against an oak-tree, while she tied the bonnet-strings with trembling fingers.

"I belong to black folks still. I'm not fit to be yourn yet," she murmured, in a choked voice and a confusion of blushes. "I'm a ig'-rant, foolish girl now, but I'm a-goin' to skule and git a eddication, an' mebbe some day you'll 'low I'm white—white as you. Good-bye!"

To his astonishment, she turned and walked rapidly away, and although he sprang to his feet and called her by name, her walk changed

to a run and she fled from him. Very soon she was out of the woods and out of his sight.

A red lizard crept from under the log and looked furtively into the face of the vexed young man, who failed to observe it. A striped snake poked out its head and blinked its small, malicious eyes at him. The lizard saw the wicked eyes and disappeared trembling into the decayed recesses of the log. Some long, dark streamers of moss swayed mournfully from an overhanging bough, for a light breeze had sprung up.

In a tumult of emotion, young Aikens mounted his horse and rode slowly home. He reflected that for this fair child, with her unfortunate parentage and her dangerous beauty, there was no better fate than the one he offered her. Undoubtedly her happiness would be safer in his hands than elsewhere. The future he was planning for her was in fact a benefit and a blessing, and that was the only sensible way of looking at it. For she was the most interesting young creature he had ever seen. Her little heart was a well

of purity and love for him. It was odd she should have assumed that they were to be married; it was ridiculous, laughable, pathetic. It showed what a child she was to have made such a mistake, and Ralph plumed himself not a little on his honesty in having undeceived her. It was evident that she had lived apart from the blacks on the plantation, or she would have known better. She would have learned a different morality from them, he thought. What a hideous parody it was that this fair girl should be a product of their race! It was monstrous that she should have to live among them. He would save her—at least he would save her from *that* fate, in the only way possible, and it was rather convenient on the whole that there was only one way of saving her, and that the law forbade his thinking of any other. His conscience being in the keeping of the state, there was no need to consult it further.

CHAPTER V

THE building that served both as school-house and church for the blacks of this neighborhood, stood a little off the road, and was surrounded on two sides by cotton-fields, while in the rear it was flanked by part of the same stretch of pines and oakland in which Theresa had met Ralph Aikens.

The meeting on this particular Sunday afternoon was well attended; the day being fair, the congregation was out in its best attire. The men, as a rule, wore black suits which, however soiled, ill-fitting or threadbare, expressed their yearning for social decorum and gentility. The women, having no conventional rule to guide them, were altogether at sea so far as appropriateness in dress was concerned. Their costumes were varied according to the fancy of the individual, but the majority were clad in poor cotton stuff, sometimes gaily colored, but more often faded from

frequent washing. Some of these garments, now almost white, were originally of a decided color, the skirt being occasionally of a more pronounced hue than the waist. Their hats were of straw, and more often untrimmed than overtrimmed. A few of the girls were neatly clad in decent calico, and some were decked off with cheap lace and ribbons. The effect as a whole, was less pleasing than one might imagine, chiefly from the absence of vivid coloring. The sharp contrast of black features against the background of faded, whitish gowns lent an effectiveness that failed somehow to be picturesque. It was noticeable that good looks among the women were rare. Their figures as a rule, were angular, and their chests hollow. The older women were bent and shapeless; the men in this respect had the advantage.

The building was of frame; the seats were uncushioned pine boards; the windows were four square holes closed by wooden shutters. Through two of these open windows one could see a stretch of light brown earth, and

a piece of blue sky with white clouds sailing over it; on the other side, the woods were visible, and some trees dipped their branches almost into the faces of the congregation. There was no pulpit. A small reading-table stood near the centre of the room, and an unpainted desk with a switch lying across it had been pushed against the wall in a palpable effort to hide the school in the bosom of the church.

The minister, an elderly negro, clad also in respectable but seedy black, arrived in a tottering buggy drawn by an emaciated mule. The animal was tied to a tree outside, and feasted on what leaves and shoots it could reach. Several other mules whose owners came astride them did the same as far as circumstances would permit.

It was quite a long time after the people assembled before the services began, but this caused no annoyance, for the congregation dispersed itself in groups out of doors and discussed matters of local interest. Two choirs began to practice their hymns; one

in the church and one outside. There had been a division of sentiment in the congregation on the question of devotional music, some insisting on a shouting, jerking, tuneless kind of chant with an accompaniment of crazy gestures, and others preferring a style more in keeping with the spiritual longings of the race. In the fear of losing either set of disputants from his flock, the preacher had settled the difficulty by pressing both choirs into service and dividing the exercises between them,—this tolerant, inconvenient method of settling a question being dear to the long-suffering, absurdly patient negro heart.

In the course of time, the groups outside broke up and settled themselves expectantly on the hard benches within. The minister began his prayer, but he was evidently suffering from a severe cold, for his voice was hoarse and weak. Choir No. 1 sang with plaintive fervor,

“ We is walkin’ in de light o’ God ; ”—

the minister prayed again and read a selec-

tion. Choir No. 2 then started on its barbarous course with pounding of feet and extravagant shouts. The more respectable members of the congregation looked severe disapproval; some of the young people sniggered. The minister waited patiently, hoping it would soon be over. He consulted his watch several times, but the choir kept on. There seemed to be no end to the verses; it was impossible to tell what they were singing about, except that a constantly recurring chorus announced,

“We’ll soon leave de wilderness —
Oh, brother, come along!”

The worthy man looked reproachfully at a certain Jerry Watkins, the leader of the choir. He raised his hand and waved it authoritatively, but Jerry was not looking at him, and the choir continued at full blast. The voices rose louder and louder; the faces of the young women at Jerry’s side showed increasing excitement. Their eyes blazed, their heads bobbed up and down rhythmically, they

waved their handkerchiefs and stamped their feet. Several members of the congregation were developing signs of hysteria and cried out irrelevantly, "We's all poor critters." Many of the young people began to laugh aloud. The meeting was on the verge of breaking into a scene of wild disorder and emotional frenzy. The minister coughed weakly and cast an appealing glance to the right and left, as if imploring some one to come to his aid. He was an old man, and his hoarse, quavering voice could not be heard against the volume of sound that the choir was now pouring forth.

A young man then arose, slowly at first, from his seat by the window, and walked quickly to the front. He was a stranger to nearly all in the room. In his hand he held the switch that had been lying on the desk against the wall, and he rapped sharply with it on the table before him.

"The choir will take their seats," he called out in a clear, firm voice. In astonishment, they sat down, open-mouthed. Jerry Watkins

waved his singing-book frantically—he held it upside down, for his musical efforts were wholly extemporaneous—but no one followed him, and he too sat down, mopping his brow with an air of having done his duty like a man.

“The brother on my left will lead us in prayer,” said the young man, and retired quietly to his seat by the window. The brother on his left was our friend, Wesley Anderson. He had been sitting on the front bench with folded arms; his composure and air of gentle dignity had caused the stranger to single him out to lead the excited assembly back to moderation and decorum.

Wesley had been longing for such an opportunity. Speech was easy to him when the Lord told him what to say, and on this occasion the Lord had not only prepared his mind beforehand, but had put into the mouths of the foolish, shouting choir the very words he wanted for a text.

He rose hastily and began his prayer with honeyed phrases designed to attract the wav-

ering attention of the Lord Jesus and incline Him to bend His ear toward His black children. It was necessary to remind Him forcibly of their existence by relating with energetic gesticulation their past experiences and sufferings. Wesley's black, weather-beaten face was turned upward, while his deep voice poured forth its narrative in accents of piteous solicitation. Uncultured and illiterate as he was, the old negro never hesitated for a word ; texts and Biblical phrases rolled from his tongue, transformed by a vivid imagination and the picturesque dialect of his race into new and extraordinary meanings. Finally, it was evident that his utterances were addressed more to the understanding of his audience than to the ear of the Deity.

“De Lord Jesus know what He's about !” he cried, clasping his hands together with enthusiasm. “He's a-mindin' Hissself agin o' dem chillen o' Israel !” He warmed to the old familiar theme ; it was evident that his audience warmed with him. They listened as if spellbound while Wesley established point

after point in the wonderful likeness which he beheld in the history of the two races. A prophetic light shone from his eyes; it was the light that had illumined the darkness of slavery—the guiding star of religious hope to which this ignorant and degraded race had clung with sublime faith through all its wanderings. The time had now come to point out the rapturous fulfilment of an heroic trust. A new interpretation was visible: the day of rejoicing was close at hand; the Lord God was already visible in the burning bush.

“Thirty-three year done gone by, but not forty, my sisters and brudders”—he continued, while every face was turned toward him, even the children listening eagerly—“sence de wah. De Lord Jesus gwine to pass by in seven mo’ year; den de colored peoples gwine to be lift’ up out o’ dere tribulations and humbleness. Dey’ll be set up on high places, dey’ll have gran’ houses to live in an’ mules and oxen to draw ’em to church like dey was big folks. Blessed be de name o’ de Lord when de day o’ our rejoicin’ sets in, an’ we’s called upon to

weep no mo', an' go thirsty an' hunger no mo', an' what we plants an' hoes for, we reaps and sells and puts in our pockets fo' de chillen at home, an' not fo' de white man to feed his chillen upon. Lord Jesus, we ain't no bad feelin's ag'in de white man, but teach us, Lord, to possess our souls in patience fo' de day o' His judgment until He leave His marcy-seat! Sing, rejoice, O Israel, and play upon a harp o' many strings, fo' in seven year mo' He deliver His darlin' f'om de lions,—He lead us out o' dis yere wilderness when de forty year is up. Den He wipe ebery tear away, He giv' de staff o' life into our han's an' tell us to lean upon it when we's weary and heart-broken and sad! Seven mo' year and we's free o' dis yere wilderness, de Lord be praised! Amen!"

Wesley sank into his seat, exhausted by the passion of his eloquence which was now having a powerful effect on his hearers. Their heads were bowed and their eyes streaming with tears. The feeble old minister came forward and informed his flock in a voice of deep emotion that he reckoned the Lord had spoken

through the tongue of Brother Anderson, and he fully endorsed his doctrine as comforting and scriptural. He hoped they would accept it as a prophecy and be reconciled to bear all the trials of their lot without complaining during the coming seven years. Then they would be clear of the wilderness.

He sat down in a fit of coughing, and the young man who had silenced the choir arose. His manner was abrupt; his voice somewhat harsh; he spoke hesitatingly with his dark hands pressed together as if unaccustomed to public utterance. Some of the glib brethren were fearful that he would break down during the first few sentences,—a never-to-be-forgotten disgrace in the eyes of this oratory-loving people.

“We black folks”—he began, slowly—“I reckon, don’t need to wait forty years for the Lord to pass by. I reckon we spend time waiting when we might be doing. I have come here, friends, to teach school in this building. I hope to have as good a school as there is in the state of Alabama. But nobody

ever walked out of such a wilderness as we're in now without going through one door, and that's the door of the schoolroom. I want you to send your children to school to-morrow and keep them here every day, and I promise you that every day those children come, if it's from now until next December they'll find me here to teach them."

A peal of thunder and a flash of lightning caused the speaker to pause. He glanced at the open windows, through which the rain was beginning to splash in. To close the shutters would leave the building in darkness, but it was the only way to keep the rain out. The women began to murmur and to edge away from the walls, out of reach of the rain, which was fast settling into a heavy pour.

"Look!" he cried, reproachfully, waving one hand toward the nearest window,—“not a pane of glass in this building! If you'll help pay for the material, I'll undertake to put glass windows in this church so we can worship God here without fear o' getting soaked, and the little children can see their books in

school without shivering. We need a tight roof, too," he added, glancing up at the drops of water which were now trickling from the rafters.

"Dis yere ain't de time nor de 'casion for to talk o' fixin' winders an' mendin' roofs," said Jerry Watkins, rising from his seat to address the presumptuous teacher in tones of mingled grief, scorn, and stern reproof. "We's come here for sperritual comfort an' not to be told tales o' our poverty-strickenness. 'Blessed be de pore in sperrit,' an, we's pore enough I reckon to grab all dat blessin'. Ef dere be a hole in yonder roof, what dat signify? What it signify ef de rain do come troo, ef we kin look up an' behold de count'nance o' de Lord Jesus peerin' down from His marcy-seat to spy on de doin's o' His black chillen in dis yere old shanty? Warn't de Lord on hand an' mighty nigh when de poor nigger folks prayed for freedom in dem ole bush arbors, jes' for all de world like dem bush arbors war gran' temples o' marble an' precious stones? I 'spec' de Lord Jesus 'll mend

dat roof bime-by when He git ready—like enough when de seben mo' year done pass by dat Brudder Anderson speak about."

These remarks produced a peculiar effect on the darked-skinned stranger. His eyes flashed and his face quivered as he came forward again with an imperious gesture. In the excitement of the moment, his embarrassment vanished; his speech became singularly clear and persuasive; soon it took on a deep-toned eloquence.

"Oh, my people, my poor people!" he cried, extending his arms toward them, "I too want you to be lifted up out of your misery! I have come down here to give you what help lies in my power, not to rail at you. God forbid that I should be puffed up with vanity and think myself better than you, but I have been blessed with some education and other golden opportunities, and I am here to use them for your benefit. It cuts me to the heart to see how you live; nay, it fills me with shame, with shame! You for whom so much has been done, so much endured! Do you mind the time when the heavens were rolled

back like a scroll, and God's lightning flashed, and His thunderbolts fell to save *you*? Have you forgotten the days when the sun stood still and the earth was darkened and a mighty nation tore its heart out and writhed in agony, that you—that *you* might live and walk about in God's sunlight like men? Oh, my people, I call upon you to rise up out of your degradation! Your prayers and your prophecies are a mockery while your lives are full of sin. Lift yourselves up and seek God in righteous living. No, do not heed my words if they sound harsh; lay it to my crude utterance if I have said aught to give offence—my heart is full of love and sympathy—I want only to work with you, to be one of you."

The meeting broke up suddenly. The congregation gathered around the young teacher to examine him curiously. Wesley Anderson, though much discomfited by the slight laid upon his prophetic utterance, hastened to clasp the stranger's hand and welcome him to the neighborhood. He was a slender young fellow, with eyes that turned from grey to

black. There was white blood evidently in his ancestry, but heavily obscured, for his skin and hair were those of a typical black, the former being dark brown, and the latter close and woolly.

His hearers had no thought of accepting him as a leader. They eyed him good-naturedly, but critically, and commented on his speech among themselves, some expressing approval and others shaking their heads dubiously, but their chief concern was the possibility of having real glass windows in their church building. They agreed to bear the expense of the materials, and the newcomer promised that the windows should be there within a month.

They sat around and talked the matter over in all its bearings. The teacher's name was Stephen Wells,—from Virginia, he said,—and as he gave it, he wrote down in a little book the name of his questioner and the plantation on which he lived.

They felt somewhat drawn toward the young man, but mystified by his attitude, which was more paternal than the occasion

seemed to warrant. They decided to watch him closely in the future.

Wesley turned homeward with his head bent, absorbed in a study of the new teacher's discourse, which he compared restlessly with his own prophecy. Lemuel walked beside him, also lost in a study of the new teacher's words. His grandfather promised that he should begin school again and that Theresa should accompany him.

They found her waiting at the cabin door. She was sitting on the upper step, and she told them that supper was on the table.

"Mis' Aiken didn't want me to wait on her company, so I come home," she explained quietly.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN Stephen Wells opened his school the next morning he found the Anderson boy and girl among his first pupils. Lemuel's bright eyes were fixed sharply on the new instructor, his eager black face was full of expectation and watchfulness. But Theresa, toward whom the teacher's eyes were directed several times, with a look of surprised inquiry, sat with her chin resting on a slight little hand. Her eyes obediently followed the ferule to the blackboard when directed, but her gaze was pensive and her expression dreamy.

Stephen examined every pupil in the rudiments, and dismissed the school early, so that he could arrange his classes for the following day.

He began work soon afterward on the windows of the building, for the glass arrived the same week. Lemuel sometimes stayed after school hours to help him, and on one occa-

sion Theresa remained to assist in dabbing putty on the edge of the glass. The fame of his performances spread over many plantations, and his circle of gaping observers increased daily.

Meanwhile on the appointed Saturday afternoon, Wesley Anderson made his way to the home of his landlord, arriving at the back door shortly after the midday meal. It was a wide, low, rambling building of one story, surrounded by a luxuriant but neglected garden, overgrown with high grasses, weeds, rosebushes, and vines. The colonel and his family occupied the old homestead only a few months every spring, so it was not thought worth while to keep the place in repair. In the background a few tumble-down log cabins nestled, some intended to serve as outside kitchen, tool-house, and wash-house, while others gave shelter to half a dozen servants.

Wesley was admitted to the hall by a side door, and found his landlord in a back room adjoining the dining-room. This room was furnished with a desk, a couple of tables, and

one chair, on which the proprietor sat, facing a number of field-hands who had come to obtain their supplies for the month. These black fellows were in their working clothes ; some stood straight against the wall, others lounged against each other, while a few, who had brought their wives, placed them beside a pile of barrels and boxes on one side of the room. It resembled, in fact, the storeroom of a retail grocery establishment, but there were dry goods in stock as well as groceries, and the women were examining with envious eyes the rolls of gaudy cheap calico which lay on the shelf in wrappings of brown paper. Odors of sugar, ham, rum, and tobacco weighted the atmosphere heavily with suggestions of past commercial transactions, as well as good times to come, for never was such an assortment of articles and odors brought together except for purposes of barter.

Colonel Aikens, stout, florid and benevolent-looking, with slightly curling grey locks and a long grey beard, called off in a business-

like way the names of his tenants and the amount of groceries and dry goods desired by each. Every now and then he aided their choice by pointing out the superior virtues of a certain ham, or the extraordinary cheapness of his sugar, cornmeal, or coffee. He was solicitous that the women should make their selections from the calico and muslin on the shelf, and joked slyly with their husbands over the extravagance of their fashionable attire, and the becomingness of the gaudy colors they selected.

In response to his jokes, the men showed rows of even white teeth, and sometimes replied in half whispers with little jokes of their own, or shook their heads deprecatingly and often sadly over their increasing expenses, and the weakness of spouses whose hearts were so easily won by purple chintz and wholesale flattery.

Wesley ordered a smaller supply than any of the others, and declined all bargains in dress goods. His girl, he explained, had a taste of her own, and he wouldn't undertake

to suit her. She could come herself some day if she wanted to, and the colonel agreed that this was the best plan and offered to order an extra dress pattern of whatever material she might desire—"because," he said, "she's the prettiest girl on the plantation, and you ought to dress her so's to let people know it."

"I ain't hankerin' to have 'em know it, sah," Wesley replied, looking down uneasily at the floor. "I don't want to lose my gurl. She's all I got,—her an' her brudder."

"Boys, ain't any of you got sperrit enough to take that pretty girl 'long with you to church and buy ribbons for her? You're a fine set o' fellows, you are," the colonel called out waggishly.

One of the unmarried men, laughing bashfully, responded that the fault was not his.

"I been invitin' Miss Tressy time an' time again to go to church wid me, but she 'cline de invitation ever' time," he observed with plaintive candor. They all laughed in the same gentle fashion, turning the whites of

their large ox-like eyes upon Wesley, who laughed also and looked relieved.

Wesley assisted the colonel to weigh the groceries and other articles on a pair of large scales which stood on the table, and to cut off the dress lengths to suit the women. Every purchase was deposited in a large paper bag, which the tenant swung over his shoulder or hugged under his arm as he departed. Some had brought flasks which they had filled with poor whiskey or rum, and nearly all received molasses in stone jugs, which they had also brought for refilling.

“Now, Wesley,” whispered the colonel, affably, when all the others had withdrawn, “I’ve got something I’ve been saving for you. I’m goin’ to let you have it at a sacrifice.”

He led the way to a rickety stable, the door of which he flung open wide.

“Just take a look at him.” Wesley entered and saw a young ox standing in the nearest stall. He was meek-eyed and sound of limb, and the colonel explained that he had already been broken to the plough.

"I'll let you have that animal cheaper than you could buy one yourself if you went to every sale in the state. I picked him up at auction, and got him thrown in with a carriage I bought for myself. You can have him for seventy-five dollars."

"What interest?" asked Wesley, soberly.

"Same as you pay for the rest—twenty-five per cent."

"I been lookin' fo'ward to buyin' a ox this thirty year an' mo'," remarked the negro, sadly. "'Pears like I couldn't never 'ford to buy him, nohow."

"You'll save money on that ox, hirin' him out when you ain't usin' him yourself. He'll thrive on what you throw away. Feed him on cotton stalks and it won't cost you a cent to keep him, I bet."

The result of the interview was that Wesley led off the young ox and chained him within an unused cabin near by. He rejoiced over his acquisition from sheer love of ownership. His farmer's heart had never yet been gratified; but when he remembered how little

there was left after the sale of the last season's crop, he almost regretted that the wonderful bargain had been offered to him. The colonel assured him, however, that the coming crop was likely to be unprecedented in size and value, and that cotton was going to reach a higher price in the fall than it had touched since the war. So Wesley braced himself up with the colonel's happy optimism; he fed the ox lovingly and bountifully and extended his mortgage a little further into the coming crop. He called the animal, "Abraham."

CHAPTER VII

THERESA attended school regularly for some weeks and devoted herself with more ambition than she usually possessed to her books. As her teacher bent over her one day to point out an error in an example she had attempted on her slate, the girl noticed with surprise the unusual color of his eyes, and she reflected with satisfaction on this evidence of his mixed blood. Stephen was secretly pleased at the many proofs Theresa gave him of her confidence, and in no wise conjectured that his grey eyes were at the bottom of the shy, deferential glances which she bestowed upon him.

He noticed also that while she held herself aloof from the other pupils, there was nothing disdainful in her attitude. She moved in and out of their presence without exciting envy or ill-feeling, and when she sat alone at recess, her absence from their sports passed

without reproach. It seemed to be an accepted fact that Theresa did not care for their pastimes, and probably they vaguely recognized that the chords of her young life were in tune for higher melodies than might be played upon their own.

Two weeks passed by. Theresa had not seen the colonel's son since that Sunday in the woods, but she had heard of his return to the city, and her thoughts centred on the possibilities of his reappearance and on that mysterious union which she longed for without comprehending the degradation it implied. The girl's version of his interest in her was based on the consciousness of her white blood. Her quick imagination encouraged the fancy that there was something incongruous in her secluded life among the blacks, and the unqualified admiration which the white man had deigned to bestow upon her seemed to prove that he too felt the incongruity, and was determined to rescue her from such unworthy surroundings.

Theresa knew little of her mother's history.

The real tragedy of that life had been carefully kept from her knowledge by her grandfather. She knew that her father had been a white man. In her ignorant young mind this bald fact stood forth in brilliant isolation. Of social customs she knew nothing, and of race prejudice she understood enough to appreciate the existence of a color line that was outwardly visible. But the Lord had made her skin, hair and eyes like those of a more favored race, and she thankfully accepted these proofs of her kinship with superior beings, without loss of self-esteem because the rest of her household represented an inferior race.

She was not distressed because her grandfather and brothers were black, nor did she conceive it to be any reason why she should love them less. In her dream of a future union with Ralph Aikens, she had not contemplated with any distinctness a separation from the two black comrades of her home and childhood. Bound to them by the closest of human ties, yet believing herself to be of differ-

ent blood and intended for a higher destiny, herein no discrepancy had as yet presented itself to the understanding of this simple child.

Her approval of the new teacher deepened when she learned that he was a graduate of a northern college. The young man had received a fairly good education in a sectarian school which had been founded by the philanthropic energy of the North, immediately after the war. From this obscure, struggling institution he had obtained a teacher's diploma some three years before, and had subsequently worked his way through the large industrial Normal Institute established by the great leader of the negro race in Alabama. Here he learned a trade and some practical knowledge of farming.

In regard to the ancestry of Stephen Wells, I am compelled to make a somewhat elaborate explanation. Both of his parents were of mixed blood, and both could rightfully claim to be the descendants of white men. In the generation previous there was also mixed blood on the maternal side of either parent; in the

generation back of that there was again a heavy mixture; while still further back, the dark blood was pure on one side and only slightly adulterated on the other,—until we reach finally the full blooded African type from which all these variations had developed. On the other hand, the white blood was a pure, clear Anglo-Saxon current bearing the virtues and vices of a Revolutionary hero, a Maryland judge and a North Carolina planter, besides those of innumerable lesser lights of unquestioned worth and respectability. One can see at a glance that it would be exceedingly difficult to measure the exact proportion of white and black blood which the descendants of so many points of contact represented. One can also see that the transmission of mental, moral and physical qualities is a process capable of an infinite number of combinations; it proceeds along the line of arithmetrical progression into everlasting differentiations.

From this ocean of all possible combinations, an inscrutable Providence had arranged

an exceedingly simple variety for my hero. The conditions of Stephen's existence were simply these:—In the transmission of characteristics belonging to two separate and distinct races, which had intermingled several times in the course of four generations, it happened that the Anglo-Saxon inheritance contributed all the mental and moral attributes that constitute the personality of a human being. The elements of African inheritance which were fewer in number, had on the other hand so arranged themselves as to form a physical exterior to this personality. In other words, Stephen, in mind, temperament and sensibility was the sum total of his white ancestors; they had also left their mark to a certain degree on his features, but the outside covering to all these Anglo-Saxon elements was the cuticle of the black. He was a white man shut up in a black skin, though believing himself to possess only a small trace of white blood in his veins.

Desiring to be perfectly frank with my reader, I hasten to explain that in the case of Theresa

these conditions were reversed. Outwardly, she was a white woman, but inwardly the fabric of her nature was woven of African characteristics; her clinging tenderness, her devoted faith, her poetic dreaminess, were qualities bequeathed by her black ancestors.

When these strange psychological facts are understood, may I not hope that Stephen's claim to the sympathetic interest of the great white American public will be firmly established? Need I hesitate to present him to my readers as the hero of this humble romance? Those who have been moved to tears by the dark mystery of the Man with the Iron Mask will surely comprehend the tragedy involved in wearing an iron mask not only over one's features, but over every circumstance and condition of one's life.

But in the case of my heroine, have I been, alas! too frank? Have I indeed chilled the reader's interest by this witless revelation of her dark personality? If so, I can only hope that her fair exterior may cause my explanation to be forgotten, or at least ignored. To be beau-

tiful is all that is demanded of a heroine; let all else be forgotten concerning her! Nothing but death shall dim the lustre of her eyes and the enchanting fairness of her skin. I have blundered, but I assure the indulgent reader that I shall not allude to my blunder again.

Stephen was surprised one day, when three negroes, austere clad in their shabby black Sunday suits, knocked for admission at the school-house door, and seated themselves on the front bench facing the teacher's desk, which was the only desk of which the school could boast. From their air of grave deliberation it was apparent that they had come with a set purpose. Stephen recognized Wesley Anderson as one of them; another was the old minister, whose husky voice had recovered its usual tones; the third was a stranger. Mr. Simpson, the preacher, was the only one of the three who knew how to read. They listened solemnly to every word that Stephen addressed to his pupils, and to every recitation. Occasionally they glanced shyly at each other with a

thoughtful nod indicative of qualified approval, but their prevailing expression was one of deep anxiety. They seemed to be weighed down with a sense of crushing responsibility, and a depressing realization of the awful proportions of their self-imposed task.

When recess came, the three old darkies sighed and looked at each other questioningly, still unrelieved of their harassing doubts. Stephen approached them with cordiality, but it was plain that they considered their unfulfilled mission to be an obstacle to the establishment of more cordial relations. They shook hands with coy dignity, and the minister asked for a book on arithmetic. Stephen handed him the one in use by the school. Brother Simpson turned over the pages with gravity, and read aloud softly to his comrades the words, "Long Division." Adjusting their steel spectacles, the three fumbled over the page together, and shamefacedly the preacher read off the terms of an example given as an illustration of long division. Somehow Stephen was made aware that his visitors

wanted him to work out that particular sum on the blackboard; mechanically he wrote down the figures and explained every step in the process. As he named the result, which proved to be twenty-five dollars, the three heads bent simultaneously over the book, the three black wrinkled faces wearing an expression of painful embarrassment and suppressed excitement. The reverend Mr. Simpson raised the book to the light and read off in a whisper the result of the illustrating problem. Then all three stared long and earnestly at the blackboard, and again at the book. Intense satisfaction became immediately visible on their faces as Mr. Simpson explained again in a whisper that the answer on the blackboard corresponded to the one given in the book.

Stephen concluded that these old men had come to test his fitness for the position of school-teacher, and he could not but smile at the comical long-headedness which had enabled the poor old field-hands to perform their well-nigh impossible task. He could not fail either, to appreciate ~~to~~ conscientious zeal which had

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caused them to disguise the nature of their errand in a well-meant effort to spare him a wound that might prove to be unnecessary.

Stephen had always looked with the contempt of a northern born and college-bred man (for such he considered himself) upon the millions of his race occupying so large a portion of the Southland. He shuddered over their illiteracy, the statistics of which were appalling; he was still groaning in spirit over their barbarous and degraded modes of living. This naïve investigation into his merits, therefore, brought quite as much relief to him as it did to his anxious visitors, who were now literally hugging each other with joy over the discovery that their "Perfessor" could do long division. These illiterate sons of toil had made a desperate effort to test the claims of him who was sent to be to them as a fountain-head of learning. It was the first proof he had received that their blind groping for better things had any practical purpose back of it. It was pathetic; but it was also hopeful.

In their enthusiasm they shook his hand again and again as they bade him farewell.

“We’s got a perfessor now who’s gwine to eddicate our chillen like de white man’s chillen; we’s gwine to be lift’ up out o’ our ig’rance; yes, sah, we is!” was the tenor of their congratulations as they left the school-house door.

CHAPTER VIII

THE next morning Stephen found that both the Anderson children were absent from his school. He looked again for them at the afternoon session, but neither the dark, keen visage of Lemuel nor the fair, delicate face of his sister was visible in the crowded interior of the schoolroom.

Every week was bringing fresh recruits to the school, until Stephen reluctantly decided that he could receive no more,—certainly not until he was prepared to engage an assistant teacher and build an extra wing to the little frame building. As yet it was impossible to make any such additions, for his salary of twelve dollars a month was barely sufficient to pay a minimum of board and leave a much needed margin for other expenses.

He found himself obliged in many cases to advance money for the purchase of slates, copybooks, blackboards, pencils, and text-

books, on a promise of the field-hands to repay him in the fall. The text-books naturally dwindled to the few used by himself, and from them he copied on the blackboard the lessons of the day. He invested eight dollars of his savings in what seemed to him a very complete set of reading and writing charts which he hung on the wall. They were the admiration of the neighborhood, and he was continually explaining their merits to his numerous callers until he became weary of the task, especially as he found himself compelled to depend more and more on highly original methods of his own in handling classes of boys and girls whose ages varied from six to twenty-five years, and whose only common characteristic was a dense ignorance.

Many of his pupils traveled miles across the country to attend the school, yet this much-needed and highly appreciated institution had hitherto been open only three months of the year—one month in summer, and two in winter. It was now completing the second

month of its much belated winter term, and its days were numbered to an exceeding few. After six weeks' intermission it would reopen in July for four weeks more, and then another long gap would occur, during which the children would fall back into the common pit of knownothingness, from which they were dragged during the brief interval when learning was supposed to be flourishing among them.

Stephen had now succeeded in getting them into a habit of attention, and it might soon be possible to teach them things they would remember. So far, the administration of knowledge had seemed a slippery something that rolled over their woolly heads and down their crouching backs and away out the door. It would lodge nowhere at first, detained not even by their bright magnetic eyes, which seemed to absorb so much and to plead so wistfully all the while for more—more—more knowledge. Alas! The next day's review had too often proved that they remembered nothing.

But why should these dusky little people have burdened themselves with the white man's painful feats of memory, when the fresh springs of their glowing imaginations supplied them every day with new wonder-tales of Bre'r Rabbit, Bre'r Fox and other celebrities of the forest—the delicious satire and fun of which only the truly simple folk who live close to God's earth can either invent or appreciate?

Stephen believed that he could learn much from this philosophy of the illiterate which these wee philosophers expounded to each other so gleefully during recess. But in his over-conscientiousness, he often stopped the narrative to rebuke the excess of worldly cunning which the fabled four-footed heroes so unblushingly displayed. Then, the absorbed narrator, looking up with eyes of innocent surprise, would gravely carry the tale to an astonishing climax, in which it would appear that worldly cunning served only to overreach itself, and the wicked were never permitted to flourish like a green bay-tree.

Miss Edgeworth's Moral Tales could not have done better,—but were these little people laughing at him when they hugged their knees and threw back their woolly heads to reveal eyes bubbling over with mirth and mischief,—and did they really know far back in their complex little brains, that out in the great wide world of the white man's civilization, worldly cunning generally *does* bag its game, and the wicked one generally *is* permitted to flourish like a green bay-tree? He could not tell. There are none so wise as the truly simple, and Stephen feared that he was neither wise nor simple enough to read these children aright. There was indeed no affinity between his white mentality and their mysterious processes of thought.

He spoke to them in an unknown tongue of fairly good colloquial English, but it was not their English. With dogged patience, he adjusted his quaint system of instruction to suit their needs, and adopted as much of their dialect as he could remember in his explanations. I cannot say that he was one of those

teachers who are born, not made. He was held to his vocation by what I must describe as a sort of aggressive determination to push his race forward into a hand-to-hand struggle with existing conditions. The Anglo-Saxon instinct of resistance to circumstance was strong within him—a direct inheritance from the masterful force which had founded colonies, developed continents and overthrown tyrants from one generation to another. He was gloomily conscious at times that his mood was not that of the gentle missionary whose efforts to uplift are based on a complete surrender of all personal ambition to the will of God. His hatred of injustice was far greater than his desire to bless, and his choice of the vocation of missionary teacher was in obedience to a passionate impulse to overcome whatever barriers shut out his people from material and moral progress.

Probably he would not have made such a choice if his instructors at the sectarian college had not labored assiduously to set his feet in this direction. The woes of his race had been

held before his eyes from the moment he entered the college until he departed from its doors; it was persistently pointed out to him that improvement must come from within; his people must depend on themselves and work out their own salvation.

Accordingly, Stephen gave himself up wholly to his herculean task. For patience, he substituted perseverance, and an invincible resolution took the place of the happy optimism of the philanthropist. The children were to be made to learn. His people were to be forced into self-improvement, whether they would or not. When failure threatened, he took refuge in a despairing stubbornness, and plodded on.

Such an iron will soon make itself felt in the neighborhood. A power greater than themselves was exactly what the blacks needed, and they hailed it with delight. Without special gifts as a teacher, Stephen stood forth nevertheless as a leader of men. This fact, however, was more clearly felt than expressed, for in every cabin he was described

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with enthusiasm as the "gran' perfessor"; the faith of the ignorant in his learning was unbounded and brought sweet comfort to many faint and weary hearts.

Late in the afternoon, Stephen started to visit the Anderson cabin, to see what had become of his two pupils. He feared that illness might have befallen the old negro, whom he sincerely esteemed. It was nearly dark and he expected to find the little family at their evening meal.

Lemuel was sitting on the cabin steps whittling a stick as Stephen approached. His head was bent, and he refused to look up as Stephen addressed him and inquired why he and his sister had both been absent from school that day.

"Tressy's gone," was the reply, as he whittled on: "she gone 'way."

"Gone where?"

"Gone to keep house fo' white man." Lemuel pulled out a much soiled and once highly colored bandanna handkerchief, which he applied to his eyes. "Gran'pap gwine to

die soon, I 'spec'. Tressy broke his heart dis time—she bad, heartless gurl."

With a cold numbness in his heart, Stephen pushed open the door, and entered.

It was a small, poorly-lighted room; one of the inevitable square holes which served as windows being closed and the other letting in enough light to show that the bare, carpetless floor was scrupulously clean, and the two beds, which stood at different angles, were spotlessly white, the pillows being decorated with starched and frilled pillow-shams, and the beds partly covered with folded patch-work quilts. A chest of drawers, two old tables, and a few decrepit chairs completed the furniture of this humble home, which Stephen recognized as about the average in comfort and cleanliness. The striking feature in this, as in all negro cabins of the South, was the rude, yawning fireplace. Down its vast slanting chimney the daylight fell on a heap of cold ashes on the hearth below; above there was a wide ledge of plaster which served as a kind of shelf, and on it

there were various little objects arranged with a view to adornment. Poor little ornaments enough they were: a broken remnant of a cheap vase, a painted cup without a saucer, a little square of dingy mirror, a bird's nest, a curiously shaped stone, a tin box, an almanac of obsolete date, and a calendar two years old. Several cuttings from newspapers were pinned on the roughly plastered walls; there was a picture of Jefferson Davis, and another of a southern statesman; their display was for artistic effect, and not because the originals were dear to memory. Some yellow ears of corn hung from the rafters: a long brush made of heavy dried grasses stood in a corner convenient to the fireplace. Stephen's glance did not take in all these paltry details, but was centred immediately on the figure of Wesley Anderson, who was sitting before the fireplace, with his head sunk on his breast. Stephen laid his hand on his shoulder.

"Where is Theresa?"

For reply, the old negro shook his head and buried his face in his hands. After several ef-

forts at speech he held out a crumpled, twisted piece of paper with a whispered request for Stephen to read it.

The young man took it to the open window. When he had mastered its contents, which were ill-spelt, though neatly written in characters which he had himself helped to improve, he groaned aloud, and threw the paper on the table with a passionate gesture.

"Lemme hear it ag'in," said the stricken one, turning his sad eyes upon Stephen, who seized the note again and read aloud Theresa's parting message to her grandfather.

"I am going to Perryville to Mr. Ralph Aikens, who is going to educate me for a white lady, because I am white. Some day I am coming back to you and Lemuel and take you back with me. Do not forget your little white bird because her white blood calls her away. She will come back again and be always your loving Theresa."

"Yes, she come back,—she come back like her mudder done, to die of a broken heart," muttered Wesley, in quivering accents.

"How long has she been gone? Tell me." Stephen put both hands on the old negro's shoulders and shook him.

Wesley told him what little there was to tell. In the early morning Theresa had prepared his breakfast as usual, but he remembered that she had embraced him with peculiar tenderness as he set out for his day's work in the field, while her eyes looked "like two stars in a well," he said. The two children had started quite late to school, Theresa carrying a little bundle and wearing a straw hat instead of her sunbonnet. After going a short distance, she had produced the note already carefully written beforehand and told Lemuel to go on to the school by himself.

She showed him a railroad ticket which had been given her, and after kissing him good-bye, she made her way alone and turned into a road which they all knew led to the nearest railroad station, leaving Lemuel rooted to the spot with wonder. He had walked mechanically on to the schoolhouse, but turned back from its door, and, after a prolonged medita-

tion had started finally on a full run to his grandfather, whom he found in the field. The latter part of the narrative was contributed by Lemuel, who entered the cabin as soon as he heard their voices.

"Why didn't you act a man's part and go with your sister if you couldn't persuade her to return home?" demanded the young teacher, hoarsely.

"Tressy, she say she white and know eberyting what's right to do," murmured the abashed youth, rolling his tear-laden eyes, while he clutched his wool in desperation. Stephen threw the crumpled, tear-stained note again on the table, and stood silent for a moment in anguish of thought. A faint hope suddenly sprang within him. He asked what time it was when Theresa left the house. Lemuel thought it was about twelve o'clock.

"The afternoon train leaves at 1:30 for Perryville. It is just possible she may have missed that. Why didn't *you* follow her?" Stephen turned his angry, reproachful eyes on Wesley.

The old darkey fell on his knees beside Theresa's little bed.

"She's ain't de fu'st dat's took f'om me by de white man. My Evaline, Tressy's mudder, she gone dat way. Follerin' ain't no use when de white man git his hold on yer gurl. She foller *him* till he leave her, an' den she come back to die, to die! All de strength gone out o' dese pore ole knees when I hear dat turrible piece o' news. Blessed Jesus, what for yer send dis tribulation to pore ole nigger what's tryin' to keep faith an' believe in yer? Was yer displease 'cause I tell de folks yer was comin' dis way once mo' to lif' up de race? Was yer displease at dis cornsequential, wranglin' ole nigger, an' want to lay 'im low? Oh, blessed Jesus, I'se gwine for to prophesy no mo'! I'se willin' to b'leeve de black folks was made to lie under de heel o' de white man, foreber and eber, if dat cornfession give yer sa'sfaction. Lord Jesus, strike dis ole crazy, shake-joint dead, tear him limb f'om limb—but fetch back dat lily white bird dat little Tressy!"

With a cry of rage—the rage of the Anglo-Saxon when his chivalrous instinct for the protection of the weak is aroused—Stephen seized his hat and rushed past Lemuel, whom he nearly knocked down in his desperate haste to get out of the cabin. He did not stop to explain his despairing hope that Theresa might yet be found, but dashed toward the railroad by a short cut across the fields, and followed the track toward the station. He ran rapidly, springing from tire to tire in his mad haste, and made such speed that, on reaching the station, there were fifteen minutes to spare before the arrival of the evening train for Perryville. In fact the south-bound train had not yet appeared, and it would pass before the Perryville express.

Stephen looked hurriedly into every corner of the waiting-rooms, into the baggage-room, and even into the telegraph office. There was no sign of Theresa Anderson.

With beating heart he asked the ticket-agent if a young girl—a *white* lady in a straw hat—had taken the train for Perryville that afternoon?

“Not for Perryville: she boarded the train going south,” was the reply.

Stephen's heart gave a bound. The train going south—away from Perryville! Was Theresa skilled enough in deception to plan deliberately to mislead her pursuers? After a moment's reflection he decided that in her ignorance she might have taken the south-bound train by mistake. He determined to follow on the train now nearly due. On looking at the schedule displayed on the wall, he saw that there was no town of any size for many miles southward.

It seemed unlikely that young Aikens should have directed Theresa to meet him in any locality far removed from the town of Perryville in which he spent most of his time. He asked the ticket-agent what happened when persons boarded the wrong train, and received the reply that they were put off at the next station.

Theresa might have taken the next train back, and landed in Perryville a few hours later. Doubtless she had done so. He would

take the south-bound train first, however, and if he did not find her he would wait at the next station for the Perryville train. He bought his ticket just as the south-bound train steamed up to the platform.

Stephen sat only a few minutes in the colored coach before the conductor came through and took up the ticket which entitled him to a ride as far as the next station.

"It's a flag station," the official explained, "but I'll let you off."

Doubtless Theresa's mistake—supposing she had made a mistake—would have been discovered before reaching this flag station. She would have been put off, to take the next train back, and was probably now in Perryville—"where I shall be also in a few hours," Stephen concluded. He made up his mind to spend the night searching for her.

The train slowed up to permit Stephen to alight. As he swung himself off, he perceived a female figure seated on a bench by the station door and half hidden in the shadow of the building.

It was now dark. The young man mounted the steps breathlessly, with his eyes fixed on that slight, shrinking figure, by the side of which lay a small bundle. It was Theresa.

CHAPTER IX

TREMBLING with excitement, Stephen stepped forward without speaking, and sat down hastily by the side of the runaway. He was breathing heavily, and for the moment, speech was impossible. His hand clutched the girl's skirt as it lay on the edge of the bench, and he realized with fierce exultation, that she was his prisoner. His action caused her to turn suddenly and fix her gaze upon his face. Looking into hers, Stephen was conscious, even through the dusk, of its fairness; he gasped for breath and his hand loosened its hold on her skirt. Alas! how fair, how white, how beautiful she was! No doubt she had calculated the cost of her flight; she believed happiness to be awaiting her and counted the bonds of racial union stronger than those made by the laws of man. How could he who represented only the associations she was fleeing from, hope to persuade her that

worse horrors were veiled behind that gilded future? Overcome by a sudden shameful self-consciousness, he could do no more than whisper her name hoarsely:

“Theresa!”

She could barely see his face, but Stephen read the quick disappointment in hers. She had at first mistaken him for her white lover. He found his voice at last.

“It’s only I, your teacher. I’ve come to take you back. You must come with me—you do not know what you are doing, Theresa.”

“I give my promise to go to Perryville. I took the wrong train, and the one back didn’t stop. Oh, why can’t I go on to-night? What for you tryin’ to hinder me?” she cried, wringing her hands.

“I am going to hinder you from a life of shame. Excuse me, I haven’t the skill to put it in soft language. I don’t know any fine words for such things. I’m a common negro,—you can despise me all you want to,—I have no white skin to set me up in your estimation, but I know right from wrong. I

am not going to let you do this thing. You are too young—too innocent—too pure to understand what it means.”

“That is what *he* says,” cried the girl, clasping her hands and turning her white profile upward, “that I’m innocent and pure of heart like a white lady, and that is why he loves me!”

“Ah! and he would take advantage of your innocence, would he? We’ll see about that,—you will go back with me”—Stephen caught her wrist and held it with fingers of iron, “and you will not speak to that man again; you will turn away from every white man who offers you his admiration or his love; his love! Without marriage, without honor, without a legal tie to bind him; how dare he prate to you of love!”

“It’s the law that’s wrong—he says he *has* to obey the law,” cried the frightened child, piteously trying to recall the white man’s arguments.

“They have made the law to suit themselves, Theresa; don’t talk to me about the

law! It exists only for the degradation of our poor women!"

There was silence for a moment while Theresa pondered these bitter words. Finally she said, faintly,

"My mother was married to a white man."

"Not married," he contradicted, sternly.

"Oh, yes,—she was his colored wife."

This phrase was no invention of hers; it is a familiar one in the Black Belt.

"Colored wife! God in heaven! Is that what they call it? There is no such thing as a colored wife to a white man down here."

Theresa looked at him and began to tremble.

"What was she?"

"Let the angels in heaven tell what she was, I cannot,—I do not know. Betrayed—broken-hearted—wronged—but the blame was not hers—no, with all the laws of the State against her, how could *she* be held responsible? Oh, my poor girl, I am going to save you from that fate, if I have to kill a white devil to accomplish it. You are going back with me on the next train."

Theresa gave a little moan and hung her head in an attitude of shame. She made no further resistance.

The young teacher sat watching her closely, with his hand still upon her wrist. This abominable evil was not to be committed; he exulted in the thought that he had arrived in the nick of time to circumvent the white man's fiendish plans.

A brilliant light gleamed suddenly in the distance. It was the headlight of an approaching train. With a shriek and a roar it rushed past, while the little frame station shivered with the shock of the reverberation, and the cold night air blew in the faces of the would-be passengers, stirring Theresa's thin gown.

Stephen rose to his feet with an exclamation of intense dismay. He remembered that it was a flag station and he should have asked to have the train stopped. He sat down again in bewilderment. The station-master came out, bearing a lantern, which he flashed in their faces.

"What's going on out here?" he demanded, roughly. "What are you two sitting together for? The lady's been here all afternoon." His suspicions were aroused by the disparity of color in the two faces before him; he was instantly ready to protect the white womanhood of the South from the horrors of race amalgamation.

"We're both colored," said Stephen, quietly. The explanation was plausible enough in that land of mixed races, but to satisfy himself further, the man flashed his lantern again in Theresa's face.

"Most people would hardly think it, but I reckon I can tell it every time. You'd better not fool away any more time round here. Go in where you b'long, to the colored waiting-room. You've no business out here."

The belated travelers rose hastily to leave the station. Stephen knew there was no other train until midnight, and they would have to walk home. He was too absorbed in thought to resent the insolence which was cloaked in the authority of a railroad official, but walked

away with gloomy eyes and set lips, Theresa following him meekly. The agent called after them:

"If you're lookin' for to get spliced, there's a nigger preacher over yonder. He's got a broomstick you can jump over—and jumpin' backward will make you free again, when you git tired o' one another." He laughed coarsely as he sauntered into the station.

Stumblingly poor Theresa made her way over the uneven ground, sometimes falling against her escort in the darkness. Stephen held out his hand to steady her, and, as he did so, with the station-master's insulting words ringing in his ears, an idea flashed across his brain. He stopped suddenly, hesitated, and went on again.

"Come along," he said, encouragingly.

"Where are we going?" The sound of tears was in her voice. Stephen told her they would have to walk home, a distance of six miles. It was unfortunate that there was no moonlight. Even the stars refused to shine. Perhaps they could hire a buggy somewhere.

He peered around, but there seemed to be no settlement near. The country looked wild and desolate. Not very far distant, however, he noticed a faint, gleaming light that might indicate a humble dwelling. Perhaps it was the home of the negro preacher.

He looked down again at the panting young creature by his side. How evident that she stood in need of a man's protection,—and again the novel idea took possession of him. There were reasons for and against it. There was a lack of dignity in such haste, but above all stood out the great compensating fact that this frail child needed to be fenced in by some one's protecting care; and was it not the only way out of the present situation, the only way to save her good name?

Stephen did not want a wife, but the desire to thwart the evil schemes of her would-be betrayer was strong within him. He was masterful and strong of spirit and did not doubt his ability to defend his future wife against villains of the deepest dye—black or white. Retributive justice demanded that he should

take upon himself the rôle of the avenger as well as that of the rescuer of forlorn innocence. He would punish the white man by marrying his intended victim. Besides there was no other way by which he might become the legal protector of this frail creature. Having reached this heroic conclusion, he stopped again, with an air of resolution. Theresa was weeping silently and holding on to his hand.

“Theresa, there’s only one thing for us to do. I want to protect you if I can, but there’s only one way to manage it.”

She looked up inquiringly, but could not see his face.

“Let us get married, Theresa. Over yonder’s the clergyman. It will be the best thing for you.”

Sobbing violently, she still clung to his hand.

“You think I been wicked—an’ my mother too!”

“No, no; God forbid that I should sit in judgment of her,—poor soul—she lived according to the light that was given her. God

will judge *him*, not her. Think of her as spotless, sinned against but sinless! I believe the angels in heaven have a place set apart for her,—for all such as her, Theresa,—they weep, they weep over her fate, but they do not condemn. Neither must you. But I should be condemned if I permitted another sacrifice of this kind. I am here to save you—to marry you, so I can protect you. Will you have me, Theresa?”

“I don’t keer what I do now,” she answered, forlornly.

He understood that she consented, for she followed him willingly, still clinging to his hand. They made their way along the road toward the dim light which seemed to be the only cheerful spark in the universe at that moment.

Stephen knocked and the door was soon opened.

“We want you to marry us, please,” he said, briefly.

The preacher, who was in his shirt-sleeves, stared at them.

“Hey?” he said, doubtfully.

“We’re both colored,” said Stephen. The negro’s face showed relief.

“Come right along in an’ set down.” His face beamed.

“I got a new prayer-book and you’s can have the first cere-money out o’ it. ’Scuse my misunderstandin’ what job yer wanted. We has to be keerful nowadays on account o’ so many lynchin’s. I ain’t gwine to mix up in any ’malagamation business ef I kin help it,—no sah!” Laughing, he shook his head, knowingly.

They entered the small, close room of his cabin, and the preacher summoned his wife and mother-in-law as witnesses. It was quite a tedious ceremony, for he bungled through several prayers of extraordinary length, and read them an exhortation which greatly tried Stephen’s patience. The business of filling out the marriage certificate was also an interminable process. When Stephen paid the worthy man it did seem as if he had more than earned his modest fee by the even-

ing's performance. He followed them to the door with extravagantly expressed wishes for their future happiness, and pronounced a second benediction before they could descend the tumble-down steps of his little shanty.

Stephen grasped his wife's hand firmly as he led her into the darkness.

"Now we're all right," he said, with brief satisfaction, and they walked on in silence.

There was nothing else to do but return to the station and wait there for the midnight train. Quite weary they reached its inhospitable shelter and made their way immediately into the waiting-room designated for colored people. An oil lamp cast a weak, ineffectual glare into their faces. Stephen noticed the pallor of Theresa's face and her air of exhaustion and depression. She sat down on the bench. As he observed her pale beauty he thought of his own dark skin, his homely features, which bore all the marks of his degraded race. He looked at Theresa's silky hair, and instinctively, as he removed his hat, he passed his hand over his head and felt the close tightly

curling locks which, more than any other characteristic, told the tale of African descent.

“She was never meant to be wife of mine,” was his mournful reflection. He had no knowledge of his Anglo-Saxon inheritance to draw upon for comfort. It would have yielded a very dubious kind of comfort for that matter. He sat down near her, but not by her side, and was soon lost in painful thoughts. Theresa laid her head on her bundle of clothing and appeared to fall asleep. In this manner they spent the long hours until the arrival of the midnight train, Stephen taking care this time to have it flagged in advance. The station-master lived near and came over a few minutes before its arrival. He was too sleepy and cross to take any further notice of the young couple. They climbed awkwardly into the colored coach, there being no assistance extended by the conductor. Theresa stood helpless before the high steps until Stephen, coming to his senses, seized her in awkward haste, and lifted her from the ground to the platform—

scrambling up himself as the train gave a jerk which threw them both into the doorway, and precipitated them into the first unoccupied seat.

CHAPTER X

THE newly made bridegroom's thoughts were busy with financial calculations on the way home. With his limited means the support of a wife was a prodigious undertaking, and the more he thought of it the more desirable seemed the project of educating Theresa at a boarding-school, where she would be safe until her education was completed and her mind more matured. Stephen decided he could accomplish this by working hard during the long vacations, and by utilizing what was left of his savings in a Northern bank.

As Stephen and Theresa drew near to their destination, the late rising moon broke through the clouds and painted the humble cabin of the Andersons in the desolate beauty of a black and white crayon sketch on grey paper.

It was an easy task to arouse Wesley from his first hour of uneasy slumber, but there was some delay before he appeared at the

door, holding a stump of a candle above his head in an effort to discover the identity of his midnight callers.

He recognized Stephen first and afterward his granddaughter, but it was not until they were both indoors and the candle set down somewhere with a trembling hand that he pronounced Theresa's name in a broken voice, and she with a stifled cry fell into his arms and broke into passionate weeping.

No word of reproach escaped the old darky as he patted his grandchild's head. Only broken ejaculations of gratitude, tearful, extravagant and tender, fell from his lips during those moments of unexpected and happy reunion. Stephen, leaning against the edge of a table, regarded this climax of the day's events with eyes that were sad as well as tired, and with an emotion not visible in his dark face. It was worth much to witness such a scene and to feel that he had been the chief agent in bringing it about.

Soon afterward, he stole unobserved from the room and seated himself on the cabin steps

in the moonlight, intending to leave the household for a short time to itself before broaching the subject of his marriage and his plans for Theresa's future. Somehow he hoped and rather expected that she would confide the fact of her marriage to her grandfather, but when Wesley, noticing his absence, followed him to the steps in a panic of self-reproachful hospitality, it was evident that the information had not yet been given.

It was an awkward enough piece of news to break hastily. Apologetically and with a somewhat rueful countenance, Stephen explained why he had urged the marriage and what protection he hoped it would afford Theresa. To his surprise, the old negro received the news with joy, and eagerly held counsel with him over Theresa's future. But it was evident that Wesley dreaded the anger of young Aikens on finding that his scheme had been frustrated, as well as his continued influence over Theresa.

Stephen described in glowing colors the great colored school of the South where he

believed Theresa would be kindly received and thoroughly protected. The summer vacation was at hand, but the school never closed all its departments even during the months of vacation, and Theresa would have in the night classes an opportunity to prepare herself for the regular session in the fall. The remnant of his savings in the Northern bank would just about pay her summer expenses, and after that, he hoped to earn more.

Never before had such munificent provision as this aided poor old Wesley in his anxious, groping efforts to care for his little family. Stephen insisted that no time should be lost in getting Theresa to the school. She was now willing to go, or at least offered no objection to the plan, but in twenty-four hours, her mind might set itself firmly the other way.

Wesley agreed to this and together they planned that Lemuel should start with her in the early morning. Abraham, the ox, might now prove himself to be a timely acquisition, inasmuch as he could be harnessed by means of ropes to an affair on wheels (consisting of

two boards laid across two axles) which Wesley called his "wagon" and which had been presented to him by his landlord shortly after the purchase of the ox. Whatever this vehicle might leave to the imagination, the wheels were good enough to travel at least as far as the great school, and Wesley was sure that the boards could be made secure by the help of nails and pegs.

Although Stephen would have preferred to hire a mule for the occasion, he yielded in favor of the ox, on the strength of Wesley's enthusiastic assurances that Abraham could travel as far and as fast as any mule on the plantation, and excelled every known animal in a happy blending of amiability and strength. As he was now engaged in eating his head off in a rear shanty, it was no wonder that his owner wanted to utilize these costly virtues. Stephen saw moreover a real advantage in the use of whatever clumsy steed Wesley possessed, as it would enable Theresa to start on her journey without making it known beforehand to any one on the plantation. Secrecy

was to be observed as well as haste, if Theresa was to reach her destination in safety. It was important that young Aikens should have no knowledge of her trip beforehand. Fortunately, the route to the school would not take her near Perryville. Wesley insisted also that it was necessary to conceal Stephen's share of responsibility in the whole affair, and begged him to open his school the next morning as if nothing had happened.

When the plan for her sudden departure was explained to Theresa, she consented indifferently but stipulated that Stephen should carry a message to Ralph Aikens and return to him the railroad ticket which he had given her. This embarrassing task he agreed willingly enough to do, but when he suggested that it would also be wise to inform Ralph of her marriage, Theresa cried out in agitation against it, and to his surprise her grandfather did the same with even greater vehemence.

The rest of the night was spent in hurried preparations for Theresa's flight, if a journey behind the deliberate Abraham might be so

termed. While Stephen and Wesley worked away by the light of the moon and a lantern, pounding and screwing the skeleton of a wagon into shape, and disentangling a mass of knotted ropes which Wesley called his "harness," Theresa and Lemuel, in a tumble-down cabin adjoining,—which served as a kitchen in warm weather—baked some corn-bread, fried a piece of bacon, and ground the coffee for a meal that might have been considered either supper or breakfast. The two conspirators outside were then summoned to the table, on which a lamp was now standing, while a couple of candles which Lemuel had placed on the mantelpiece spluttered their best to lend an air of festive brightness to the marriage feast.

Lemuel was in a befogged state of mind over his sister's attitude. He regarded her with curious, watchful eyes, and decided that her expression lacked the mirth and jollity which he always associated with weddings. The occasion seemed to him one of sincere rejoicing, however, and he determined to do

his part to increase the gayety of the affair: he succeeded, therefore, in looking as cheerful as it is possible for any human being to look who is left out of the family consultations and finds himself without a key to the situation.

The moon had disappeared behind a mass of clouds, the ground was wet with dew, and a heavy fog hung over the cotton-field as Abraham, just before daybreak, stood in all the glory of his rope trappings before the cabin-door. Stephen, Wesley and Lemuel stood grouped by the side of the rude cart after handing Theresa to the seat of honor. She was comfortably enthroned on a kitchen chair which had been placed on the low boards and securely held there by some method as mysterious as it was ingenious. Lemuel mounted a box proudly in front, his legs dangling down behind Abraham's tail. The ox carried a yoke, but Lemuel intended to guide him by reins of rope which were tied to his horns. Behind Theresa was a great pile of tough grass and dried corn stalks for the future comfort of

Abraham, and at her feet a bag of cornmeal lay for the use of the whole party. She wore her sunbonnet which her grandfather charged her not to remove until she reached her journey's end; a knitted shawl was around her shoulders, and in her lap she held a package of lunch and a bundle done up in an old newspaper.

It was a melancholy leave-taking notwithstanding that everybody tried to smile brightly and talk hopefully of her return as an accomplished scholar and teacher, but it was evident that they smiled through their tears. A wedding journey, with the bridegroom left behind, is seldom an hilarious affair. Stephen gave her a letter to the principal of the school and promised faithfully to deliver her message in Perryville. Wesley could not speak, but persisted in smiling painfully, busying himself all the while about the cart until Lemuel cracked his whip, when he seized the girl's hand in a last embrace and hugged it to his heart with a prayer for her protection. Stephen charged Lemuel to drive carefully and to re-

member the little Quaker school which he would pass on the way and if it should prove to be near dark when they reached that point, to remain there over night.

The ox stepped off solemnly, drawing his singular-looking chariot slowly into the white mist beyond which nothing could be seen. Lemuel felt in his pocket once more and was comforted by the cold touch of a huge rusty derringer with which he had secretly armed himself in defence of his sister. He had neither cartridge nor powder, but the presence of the empty weapon gave him courage, and contributed a vague suggestion of adventures to come.

Theresa bowed her head as the shadows of the night and the mists of the morning enveloped her. She shivered as she wiped away her tears. She pulled her bonnet far over her forehead as her grandfather charged her to do, and promised to look neither to the right nor to the left on this strange, lonely journey.

The grandfather and the newly-made husband stood watching the ghostly, creaking

vehicle as long as it remained in sight. They hoped it would pass through the plantation unobserved by other eyes than their own. Gladly would either of them have accompanied Theresa, but humble, obscure folk such as these are accustomed to plan according to their means and to leave the rest to Providence. We are not to suppose that their sensibilities were less keen or the dangers less apparent to their understanding because they submitted thus patiently to a ruling that was adverse to the cry of their hearts. To guard one's best beloved from every known and conceivable danger is the happy privilege of the rich, but they err who conclude that the poor love less and therefore suffer less when they trust theirs to God,—or that their bread is any sweeter because it is watered so often with the tears of loneliness and apprehension.

CHAPTER XI

It was an odd experience for these two ignorant children to be traveling alone in what seemed to be the dead of the night, the stillness being broken only by the sound of Abraham's hoofs, the creaking of the wheels and the occasional thumping of the boards when they crossed the uneven pieces of ground which Lemuel called "thank-you-marms." He had no fear of not reaching his destination, for he knew the way to the old pike road and after that it was plain sailing, for Stephen had told him they had only to follow the old pike until they should come to the village from which the school takes its name and near which it stands. But to Theresa it seemed a long, mysterious route before they reached the pike, because nothing was visible about them except the mist in which they were shrouded and through which they could hardly discern the outlines of Abraham's

heavy dimensions. The vapors began to lift, however, as they turned into the pike, and they could now see a little piece of road ahead, and the hedges on either side. Day was surely breaking, and when Lemuel pointed out the sun rising on their right, Theresa's heart grew a little less heavy,—but she closed her eyes apprehensively.

When she ventured to open them again, how beautiful the world had grown in that short time! The mist had taken itself at least half a mile away, and close at hand was the lovely, familiar foliage of the South, looking just as it had always looked around the spot she called home,—the Black Jack Oak leaves were as large and shiny as she had ever known them; the small persimmon and the red haw trees were mingling their branches in the same intimate fashion; “Joe Week” was uttering his shrill cry from hedge to hedge and the mocking bird was singing the song he had sung all spring. Her world of cotton-fields was stretching far away to the horizon; and Theresa was comforted by the thought

that though she might travel onward for many miles, the face of the scenery would still be as she had always known it.

They passed hedges thick with roses, afflicted woods veiled in sombre moss, and many a "slough" in which the wagon stood deep in water and sometimes slid into a hole; and on such occasions, Abraham would stand still patiently, after drinking all the water he could conveniently hold, as if convinced he was now at his journey's end. With shouts, kicks, and jerks of the ropes, Lemuel would at last get him started, and the vehicle with many creaks and groans would land safely on the rising ground beyond. But sometimes these sloughs were ill-looking and evil-smelling, and as they felt the breath of the swamp in their faces, they were thankful when Abraham disdained the black water and pulled them hurriedly out of its slimy depths.

They met with no adventures by the way. No one accosted them except innocent, dark-skinned, country folk like themselves. They saw very few white persons. The black peas-

ants were at work early in the field with their wives and older boys and girls beside them. Many were the cabins they passed in which very young children were apparently the only inmates. They clustered about the door, barelegged, inquisitive and speechlessly shy, —holding sometimes in their arms babies nearly as big as themselves.

The sun was very bright; the atmosphere seemed brilliantly clear; every object was sharply defined and every tree cast a very black shadow. In one of these refreshing shadows they stopped to eat their lunch, and Lemuel fed the ox generously on meal and corn stalks. It was not a nutritious diet, but neither the ox nor Lemuel knew differently, and it was the customary fare for cattle in the Black Belt.

Lemuel inquired of many the distance to the school, but the report was always that it lay very far ahead. The field-hands looked doubtfully at the slow-treading ox, and feared it would be impossible for the travelers to reach the great school before night.

Lemuel then bethought himself of the Quaker school and inquired how far it lay ahead. The answers were more encouraging. It seemed to be within reach, and to offer them a hope of shelter for the night.

It was past sundown when they arrived in sight of the two large, white, frame buildings which proved to be the Quaker school. Lemuel descended from his box and knocked at the door of the smaller building; the front porch was a bower of roses and honeysuckles, while neat muslin curtains peeped from the windows through half-closed green shutters.

It was some time before the elderly Quakeress who opened the door could grasp the situation and decide what to do with her odd-looking visitors. The contrast between the sister and brother as well as the striking beauty of the former at once enlisted her interest. Several assistant teachers gathered near to have a look at the weary ox and the primitive vehicle which had brought these young wanderers so far.

Lemuel presented his explanatory statement without his usual plaintive drawl:

“All de white blood in de fam’ly gone to make up Tressy—leff me all black!” He produced it this time as a piece of scientific information, and was surprised at the distress it brought into the faces of the gentle Quakers.

Theirs was only a day-school, and they had no accommodations for boarders, but they agreed to keep the children over night and to feed and shelter the faithful Abraham.

That evening these lowly descendants of an enslaved race sat down before a white supper-table by the side of white women, and basked in the light of their gracious presence. They drank in their delicate refinement, their little social graces; they were permitted to handle their old china, and to examine the simple ornaments and pictures of their charming home. Joy filled Theresa’s soul for the moment, but mingled with it was a tremulous consciousness that she was again partaking of forbidden fruit.

When the time for their departure came the

next morning, they climbed sorrowfully back into their uncouth chariot. The tender charity which was in the heart of the elder Quakress for their race, beamed from her aged eyes and seemed to pronounce a benediction over their young heads. They would gladly have stayed with her, but she assured them that at the school which lay beyond they would find all the good and great things that the people of their race were yearning for, so they said farewell with what grace they could and turned their faces hopefully onward.

Late in the afternoon, they met many odd looking vehicles bearing all manner of queerly clad colored folk, loaded down with provisions, hay and dry goods. But the vehicles were not any more strange looking than their own, and the people in them were not different in appearance from those they had been accustomed to see about them always. It was Saturday, and those tenants who lived within a few miles of the town were returning with their month's supplies which they had obtained either from the merchants or their

landlords. The town was very near. They reached it before sundown.

After crossing the village and climbing a gentle hill, Lemuel's delighted eyes beheld in the distance the smoke-stack, the tall chimneys and the many buildings of the great Normal and Industrial School of the colored people. A large American flag which floated above the roof of the tallest building gave a finishing touch to the air of victorious achievement which seemed to distinguish this spot from all others in the southern landscape. His boyish soul was thrilled at the sight, but as Theresa looked, she remembered only that it was a "nigger school," and that she was to enter it as a colored pupil.

CHAPTER XII

STEPHEN was not long in finding Ralph Aikens' office on the day devoted to the execution of Theresa's errand. He mounted the stairs slowly and knocked at the door bearing the lawyer's name in black letters. A voice within bade him enter, and on pushing open the door Stephen found himself facing two men who were apparently enjoying an informal chat; they were both smoking; a decanter of whiskey, two glasses and a pitcher of ice-water were on a table before them.

In a suppressed voice, Stephen stated that he wished to speak to Mr. Aikens.

"Speak on," said the owner of that name, indifferently.

Stephen was disinclined to state his errand in the presence of a third person, but as it was evident that he was not to be granted a private interview, he opened his pocketbook

and took out the railroad ticket which he laid on the table in front of young Aikens.

"I was asked to deliver this into your hands," he said, disconcerted to find that his voice was hoarse, and his tongue unnaturally stiff and dry. Perhaps his eyes looked unusually bright, and it may be that his hand trembled as he laid the ticket on the table.

"What's the matter with the fellow?" asked Ralph's companion, laying his cigar on the table, and studying the face of the black with curiosity.

"Damned impertinence," muttered Ralph, a dark flush mounting to his forehead. "Take yourself off—we don't care to be interrupted this afternoon."

But Stephen was determined to deliver Theresa's message with unmistakable clearness. He had concluded on the way thither, after deep thought on the subject, that it would be more delicate not to mention her name.

"A young girl living on Colonel Aikens' plantation asks me to say that she returns this

ticket because she did not understand your meaning, sir, when she agreed to carry out your instructions. She was too *innocent* to understand!" Stephen made no effort to suppress the thrill of indignation in his voice, or the flash of righteous anger in his eyes, and these evidences of feeling were most unhappily out of place, if his intention had been to conduct the interview peaceably.

The result of his speech was an exclamation of fury from young Aikens as he rose quickly to his feet, while an amused laugh broke from his friend, who rose negligently, showing himself to be a powerfully built man, at least six feet in height. He towered over the stripling of a negro and, looking down on him, said contemptuously,

"Get right out of here!"

"I've said nothing to be ashamed of," replied Stephen, with a kind of passionate dignity—not moving an inch. He did not mean to defy them, but he would assert the rectitude of his intentions.

In an instant both men flung themselves

upon him and pushed him through the doorway in an attempt to throw him not only out of the room, but down the stairs. Stephen vigorously resisted, in the fear of being pitched headlong down the steep, narrow stairs. He struggled fiercely, attempted to hold on to the knob of the door, and failing that, clutched one of his opponents—he hardly knew which one, but it proved to be Aikens.

“I’ll fix him!” cried the other, and whipped out a pistol from his trousers pocket. Stephen heard the click of the weapon close to his ear, and obeyed an instinct of self-preservation—forcibly though unintentionally assisted by Ralph Aikens, who pushed him violently—he leaped to avoid the pistol. He landed some distance down the staircase, after which he lost his balance and slid several steps until he reached the bottom. As he did so, the pistol was fired twice in succession, but the shots missed him. He scrambled to his feet and ran through the hall-way to the street, hearing as he ran the tramp of the two men descending the stairs, their loud laughter and

shouts of derision. It was not in human nature to stand still and be shot at, and Stephen being unarmed and no match in any respect for his pursuers, did not wait to see if they were following further, but fled across the street; wild-eyed and hatless, he rushed into a barber shop, at the open door of which lounged several colored men.

These men followed him quickly into the shop; one of them proved to be the proprietor, another his assistant, while the third, a tall, loose-jointed creature with a yellow countenance, was a combination of patron, hanger-on and general adviser. As all three demanded an explanation of the pistol shots, Stephen stated hurriedly that he had gone to the office of Mr. Aikens to transact some business, but supposed that his manner had given offence, and on being ordered out of the room, he had not left quickly as was desired. He did not go into further particulars and was surprised to find that his explanation, vague as it was, apparently satisfied the three men.

"He's quick—Mr. Aikens," said the one who

seemed to be the proprietor, "but I dunno as he bear malice long—leastwise, he ain't de kind to draw a pistol on a unarm' man—I allus reckoned he warn't," he added, thoughtfully.

"Must a been t'other one who fired," suggested the assistant, a young octoroon with curly black hair and a handsome profile.

"It was nothing," said Stephen, desiring to make light of the affair—"I don't know why they put themselves to such trouble to get me out of that room. I'd have gone soon enough anyways if they'd just given me time, but of course I didn't choose to be thrown out and have my neck broken."

The men laughed, and Stephen continued to express his regret for the whole occurrence.

"I reckon yer ain't out o' de woods yet," observed the yellow-faced one quietly, as shouts resounded in the street.

There was a shuffling noise outside as of many feet; hoarse voices called out—"Lynch the nigger! Fetch him out an' hang him!" and the doorway was suddenly crowded with

at least a dozen angry-faced, desperate-looking white men.

Quick as a flash the proprietor flung the door shut and the three men drew their pistols. The tallest one assuming the position of a leader, said in a tone of mild remonstrance:

“Now what you kickin’ up all dis row for nuffin’ for? Dere ain’t no ’casion fo’ mob-law to-day. Is yer gwine to hev’ it jes’ fo’ sport?”

“We want the nigger that’s been insultin’ a white man—we want to teach him to respect his betters,—we ain’t goin’ to let him off without a thrashin’, anyways.”

“I’ve got my wife’s clothes-line ready for him!” said another, who had wound around him several yards of rope. He had already succeeded in getting the door partly open; he stood bracing himself against the door-joist, with half his body thrust through the opening.

Stephen asked if there were no way of summoning the police.

“Perhaps,” he added, in a hasty whisper,

“they think I fired those shots, and if I just explain how it happened ——”

“Explain nuthin’,” answered his defender, roughly, giving Stephen at the same time a shove backward, “dey ain’t such fools; dey ain’t lookin’ fo’ ’scuses—dey’s lookin’ fo’ *you* to hang yer!”

It was the disagreeable truth, as he soon realized: the uproar was increasing and the threats of lynching growing louder and louder. Sticks and stones were being thrown, but the crowd came no nearer, owing to the pistols that guarded the door-way.

“What shall I do?” cried the young teacher in an agony of mortification. “I’ve brought this trouble on you people myself, and I’m not armed. Hadn’t I better give myself up?”

“Open dat closet door,” said the proprietor, turning his head a little but still keeping his eye on the street and speaking in a quick, soft whisper; “take my shavin’ coat and straw hat, an’ cup an’ tray wid de brushes on it. Git out de back way quick—afo’ de surroun’ de house.”

"What'll happen to you if I get off?" asked Stephen, losing no time in obeying these directions.

"Nuthin' mo's gwine to happen—I reckon. You kin notify de police ef yer want ter."

This seemed the most sensible course to pursue, and Stephen making all the haste he could slipped into the back room and out into a small yard from which a back-gate led into a narrow street. He closed the gate quickly and walked as calmly as possible down this alley to a larger street which he turned into with an air of leisurely unconcern, holding the tray ostentatiously before him. He saw from a distance the crowd of men around the barber-shop and directed his steps another way. No one molested him; his straw hat and professional white coat seemed ample disguise. After he had passed out of sight and sound of the mob, he inquired of a respectable-looking colored man for the police station, and made his way there as promptly as possible, feeling that every moment was a matter of life and death to his defenders.

The captain of police manifested no particular concern on being told that "a dangerous mob was attacking the barber-shop," but promised curtly to send half a dozen policemen to the spot. Stephen had the satisfaction of seeing them depart, and discreetly remained at the station house until dark.

In the evening he found his way to the back gate of the barber-shop, where after knocking several times he was admitted to the sitting-room back of the shop by the tall mulatto, who was now made known to him as Lou Lemons.

Stephen explained that he had come to thank his defenders and to return the linen coat and the straw hat. Lou received his gratitude coolly.

"Dat war jes' a leetle fracas,—it warn't no 'count," he said, indifferently.

"They meant to kill me," exclaimed Stephen, with intense bitterness, his eyes fixed on the floor,—“me,—a stranger—who had done them no harm in my life!”

“Ya-as—dat so.”

"I should think that Mr. Aikens and the fellow with him would a-been satisfied with throwin' me downstairs and firin' pistols at me—without settin' the whole town on to murder me!"

"Mars' Aikens, he done set nobody on to ye," replied the mulatto with scorn. "He ain't dat kind—he done trubble his head no mo' 'bout yer when he trowed yer out. Dat leetle lynchin' bee warn't his affair."

"Who set them on then?" asked Stephen.

"Dey don't want no settin' on—dose fellows; sey'se allus ready to jine han's an' lynch a nigger; all dey wants is de 'scuse o' hearin' dere's been a row 'tween nigger and white man."

Stephen's head sank low on his breast.

"Dey don't know no better, I reckon," commented the proprietor, good-naturedly, as if with a desire to encourage the forlorn stranger, "dey ain't got nuffin' agin yer person'ly—man; yer no cause to feel so down-hearted—'tain't yer *pusson*,—it's only yer black skin!"

Stephen, failing to see the humor of this

delicate distinction, raised his head to ask if all classes felt the same way in that part of the country.

“How de big bugs feel—de gran’ upper ten—it ain’t in de pow’r o’ language to state ’zactly; dey don’t personify no great love fo’ yo’ race, dat a fact—but day’s good to some dat sarves ’em—ya’as, dey is. Yer mought say dey look down an’ ’spise de race, and dey ’preciate de indiwid-iwid ——”

“Individuals? Ah, I see,” said Stephen, in heavy dejection.

“But dey keep dere moufs shut an’ dey ain’t aroun’ when dere’s a row kickin’ up,—dat’s all I know ’bout dere feelin’s. An’ my feelin’ is to keep dis yere six-shooter in my pocket and I ’vise you to do de same.”

CHAPTER XIII

STEPHEN's reflections on the way home were dismal enough. He could excuse the attack made on him by young Aikens as the act of a man in a violent passion. The nature of his errand and the implication of his speech might easily have aroused the temper of one who had never learned self-restraint, and who read moreover in his remarks, the sting of reproof,—and reproof from one of an inferior race was a thing to be resented and stamped out as an insult.

But after he had resolved to avoid entrance to a quarrel in a land where every incautious word seemed fraught with such dire consequences, there remained the heavy depression of spirits which this insight into the hearts of his countrymen now caused him. He could not forget that every one of those screaming fellows with murder in his heart was a fellow-citizen with whom he had once dreamed of

working for the safety of the commonwealth and the upbuilding of a new South. For had he not studied the "Science of Civilization," the "Theory of Government," and the "Politics of a Christian," while at the Sectarian College?

And yet without asking who he was or what he had done, these "fellow-citizens" were ready to hunt him down like a wild beast, and hang him to the nearest lamp-post! The cruel injustice of it almost brought tears to his eyes, while yet he trembled from head to foot in passionate anger at the thought of the indignity that had been offered to him.

When he thought of Theresa whom he had married to protect, his depression became still greater. A great protector was he! A creature whom every man's hand was against,—every white man's,—and who was not to be permitted to open his lips even in defence of his wife! The fighting instincts of the Anglo-Saxon raged suddenly within him. He breathed heavily, he clinched his hands and longed for vengeance. What should he do?

Become a bravado—armed to the teeth like Lou Lemons,—and lose his life in a vain effort to assert his manhood? This, after all, was the best use he could make of it—at least he could thus prove his manhood!

Then the utter hopelessness of his position overcame him. He knew that he was powerless to offer any kind of resistance that would amount to more than the knocking of his head against a stone wall until his brains were dashed out. He closed his eyes in the agonizing humility of this thought. As he pressed his forehead against the glass of the car-window the hot tears forced their way through his closed lids. They were the tears of a white man; so do not despise them, reader. At that moment, he would gladly have died rather than accept the alternative of submission to his lot.

“God of my fathers!” his spirit cried out, “why am I—why is my race—thus pilloried in the midst of the white man’s civilization? What have my people done to deserve a fate like this?”

The iron mask of the black race was pressing inward; surely it would crush the soul of the Anglo-Saxon! Would it remain a white man's soul? Could it endure that pressure caused by centuries of oppression, scorn and hate? How long, O reader, does it take for environment to conquer heredity?

But fortunately, Stephen knew nothing about the white soul within him, and he had not, therefore, the paralyzing fear of a possible metamorphosis within to add to his anguish. The passion and the pain of the moment began to pass slowly from him. His training and the traditions of the race to which he believed he belonged, gradually asserted their power over him.

There came into his mind a picture of the black field-hands among whom he had chosen to cast his lot. He saw them bowed down with heavy toil and blinded by ignorance appealing to him for aid with outstretched, groping hands and weary eyes. He turned to the thought of them with a cry of love and tenderness in his heart. They were his brothers

because they needed him, and not because their skins were black like his. Among them he could work for humanity, for country, for race, for God! No man could take from him *that* privilege!

And so the bruised, imprisoned white soul, looking up through its dark environment of degradation, fixed its gaze upon the eternal and for the moment, found peace. Stephen had touched the bottom pit of despair, but now he rose on shining, lovely wings—the wings that have been given to the crushed and broken-hearted of all races—and for a brief interval, he soared above his misery.

CHAPTER XIV

WHEN Wesley Anderson heard of Stephen's miserable adventure in the town of Perryville, he advised him to confide his experiences only to a select few, as it was not desirable that the story should be known in the district.

Lemuel's return the next morning relieved the minds of the two men as to Theresa's safety, and his account of their reception at the wonderful school was graphic and satisfactory. In the same week Stephen closed his school term and during the vacation he helped Wesley by supplying Theresa's place in the field, for the busy days were now drawing near, and every adult member of every colored household was needed to hoe, harrow, and thin out the too luxuriant growth of the cotton plant as it approached its prime.

He found time, however, to devote a few days of steady work to the windows of the building, and it was a proud moment for the

congregation when they assembled within a rain-proof edifice, and beheld the clear, warm sunshine streaming through the panes of glass which now marked the little church from all others of its kind. In their enjoyment of the luxury, they sat with every window tightly closed until the atmosphere became so stifling that Stephen insisted on pushing up every sash, which revealing a new virtue in the mechanism, distracted the minds of the audience from any further contemplation of the wonders of the Golden City, toward which Brother Simpson had been patiently directing their attention for the last three-quarters of an hour.

When the school opened again in July, Stephen found to his disappointment that only the very young children were able to attend; the older ones were now in the field from early dawn until seven o'clock at night. Between twelve and three the heat was too intense for any creature to bear without shelter, and it was customary for the laborers to stop work during those hours. Some spent this interval in sleep under the shade of a tree, but

many returned to the cabins and rested there after the midday meal.

Stephen made an effort to persuade the older boys and girls to spend this interval of rest in his schoolroom. A few came and seemed glad of the privilege, but several of them soon notified him that the innovation was not approved by the overseer who had charge of the fields, and that they could come no more. As the month wore away, even the younger children dropped off, and Stephen saw them afterward picking cotton by the side of their parents. He was glad when the time came to close his school.

But now came a new trouble. For several weeks, rumors had reached his ears of dissatisfaction among the colored people who lived in the eastern part of the district. These people formed a little settlement of their own and had been holding services in a log-cabin near Thomas' Mills on the creek. They looked with disfavor on Brother Simpson's style of preaching and had selected a Baptist clergyman to minister to their spiritual needs.

They claimed to receive more edification from one of his sermons than from two of Brother Simpson's.

But after the fame of Brother Simpson's glass windows had spread over the neighborhood, the primitiveness of their own house of worship cut deep into their souls and they stirred themselves to secure some compensating advantage.

They decided that four miles was too far for their children to walk to school, and petitioned the county superintendent to appoint a separate teacher for the eastern half of the district.

Stephen heard of this movement without alarm, and did not blame them for wanting a school near at hand. He did not believe, however, that the county authorities would grant the request, and troubled himself very little about it.

His consternation was great one day, when he received from the superintendent a letter enclosing just half of the month's salary with a statement that the balance of the appropriation would be withheld to pay for a Septem-

ber term of the new school to be opened at Thomas' Mills.

Stephen wrote back protesting against such a step. It would be impossible, he said, to maintain a proper school on such a salary. He had already spent a large share of his wages on furnishing his own school and what kind of a teacher could they engage on half of his meagre salary?

The county superintendent replied that the Thomas' Mills people were determined to have their separate school, and had, he was informed, withheld their children from Stephen's school during the month of July because of the distance. A full month's salary was hardly due a teacher who had not taught more than half of his scholars during that time,—and in his opinion, the money would be better expended in the way proposed.

Stephen held many consultations with the more intelligent men on the Aikens' plantation, and went with them to reason with the Thomas' Mills people. But arguments and persuasions were of no avail. They shook

their heads and maintained stoutly that the school was needed; as the Methodists had obtained school privileges for themselves, they should not try to prevent the Baptists from following their example.

The custom of holding school in church buildings had its distinct disadvantages, as Stephen now discovered. With the connivance of the county superintendent, the education of the poor people was being sacrificed to the jealousies of rival sects; and the ignorant field-hands, in their effort to obtain equal recognition for their special forms of worship were rapidly undermining the scanty facilities for education that already existed.

While Stephen worked in the cotton-field he pondered and puzzled over this subject and held many discussions with Wesley and others as they rested in the shade during the intolerable heat of midday.

The fields were now white with ripe cotton and the scene every morning and afternoon was one of busy activity, but no language can do justice to the effect of the intense heat on

the atmosphere. As Stephen looked across the level acres from his retreat under the trees, the heat itself seemed to become a visible substance that danced on waves of vibrating ether across the great prairie of white cotton.

It seemed hardly worth while to blister one's back and arms and lose one's whole skin once a month for the wretched pittance of forty cents a day, out of which the cotton picker is expected to furnish his own meals and lodging, but this was the usual rate of wages in that neighborhood and it was now too late for Stephen to secure employment in the North. He toiled on doggedly and found a grim satisfaction in sharing the lot of his comrades in every particular. Sometimes they sang plantation songs, many of which were new to the Virginian. They seemed to him to possess a far greater plaintiveness than any he had heard at home.

A great sadness took possession of him, born of the pity which he felt in his heart for his own people. How far away they seemed from the civilization which lay all around them!

How appealing was their attitude toward the great nation in the midst of which they dwelt in such obscure, poverty-stricken isolation! Was there anything like it in all history? And he who had come down among them so full of high missionary zeal, had now fallen into their ranks as a day-laborer, and was unable to raise his head above the low level of the underpaid labor markets of the South.

Again he thought of Theresa and of his ambition for her future. In the depths of his heart there lay undisturbed by the fierce struggle with ignorance and poverty, the vision of a home that was some day to be created for that daughter of two races. Within its sanctity she would never miss the chivalry that the outside world denied her. Like a princess in a lonely tower she would remain safe from the lawless admiration of the white man's eyes and the brutality of his laws. Never should she toil in the field as the daughter of an inferior race! The spindle and the distaff only should she hold in her hand. Like the virtuous woman "whose price is far above

rubies" she might seek wool and flax—yes, but never cotton,—and it was a proof of the discriminating judgment of Solomon that he disdained all mention of the great fabric which had transferred the toil of millions of women in America from the home to the field.

As Stephen worked on day by day by the side of these black women, he realized how heavily the burdens of race lay upon them. For generations they had toiled thus until their chests were hollow, their backs bent, their eyes sunken with pain and weariness. These housewives had no canned or dried vegetables, fruits, pickles, or preserves to exhibit proudly to the chance visitor. They were profoundly ignorant of all the arts and mysteries of the household. They had neither time nor opportunity to learn them. Surely the monotonous grinding factory wheel of the North was not as remorseless a taskmaster as this gay, flowering cotton plant of the South. How necessary it was, therefore,—how holy and beautiful it would be—to paint before their eyes the reality of those heavenly ideals of domestic life

which he beheld whenever he looked into his heart and thought of Theresa.

By October the work began to lighten, the days grew shorter, and the sun's rays became less oppressive. The men were looking forward to a division of the profits after the cotton should be sold in November. They had worked hard and it was a good crop.

A great idea came into Stephen's head, and he communicated it to Wesley and to several others. They resolved to call a meeting that should include the people of the whole school district and lay the idea before them. Notices were sent out by word of mouth to the large majority who could not read, and a pressing invitation was extended to the Thomas' Mills people. Only a few came from that settlement, but the whole number that assembled in the schoolhouse was large, and they waited in expectant silence for Stephen's address.

"The county superintendent has bitten off half our school fund,"—explained Stephen, "and only an ignoramus can be hired by either half. But I have come here to teach in

this community, and if you want me I am going to stay right here and keep this school going. But we must separate the school from the church. I reckon God can put up with our foolish controversies over Himself. He can forgive our fancies about the grand things that only angels know the truth of. We can afford to differ about religion, but when it comes to the schools, we've got to pull together or go under. Now what we want is a school that is separate and distinct from the church, so the Baptists won't pull one way and the Methodists another. We want to build it ourselves and run it ourselves. Here's the school—the academy—we're going to have with or without the state's help," and Stephen drew on the blackboard a rough diagram of a square building, and marked the doors and windows on it.

A murmur of enthusiasm ran through the audience. The hopeful, emotional temperament of the colored people was easily stirred, and when Stephen told them the first thing they wanted was land on which to build the

new school, a middle-aged negro who lived in the vicinity of Thomas' Mills and was known to be an exceedingly thrifty fellow, announced that he owned an acre of ground near a small woods and the school could have this little piece of ground to build on. This offer was hailed with delight, and Stephen with beaming eyes called for volunteers to do the work of carpenters and builders under his direction.

One after another of the blacks arose and pledged himself to give so many days and hours of labor. Stephen, figuring rapidly, reckoned that two months of solid labor had been pledged, and with this he thought they could proceed. The meeting broke up amid smiles of profound self-satisfaction and joy.

CHAPTER XV

HEAVY wagon-loads of baled cotton were now to be seen on the road every day, on their way to the station, and the fields were bare except for dry stalks and withered leaves.

The day of settlement was over on the Aikens' plantation, and Wesley Anderson sat in his little cabin discussing with Stephen the mystery of his empty pockets. The cotton he had raised had been sold by his landlord, who after deducting the expenses of living, the price of the ox, and the interest of his mortgage, returned to him a statement in which it appeared that Wesley was still in arrears for the interest that had been accumulating on the ox. He handed the statement to Stephen, who ran his eye over it.

"Here's a mistake—you're charged interest on Abraham from January 1st, and you didn't get him until April—and look here, these

groceries and salt pork were not all bought in January,—why man, you got them month by month, as you needed them.”

“Dat’s correc’, perfessor,” replied Wesley, calmly, “de colonel can’t nebber break de year wid his accounts. De interest run allus f’om year to year; dat’s de business-like way. Dere ain’t no mistake dere. I ’spec’ we’s done eat up all de profit, dat’s de truff; dat boy Lemuel, he’s pow’rful big eater, he is,—kin mos’ eat whole acre o’ ’taters hisself!”

“I reckon he ain’t eat up that ox,—usury’s done that!” cried Stephen, a hot wave of indignation sweeping him into forms of speech that were perilously below the standard of his graduating days,—a standard maintained so far at the cost of an incessant struggle with an old Adam of early associations. He rose quickly and paced up and down the floor of the cabin muttering to himself.

Wesley caught the last muttered word and looked up in his face appealingly.

“My brudder, it ain’t robbery, as I looks at it,” he said, in his low, gentle voice. “We’s

got to pay off somehow de cost o' our freedom,—we's got to pay somehow de cost o' dem battles. Dey was fought fo' us an' we's got de benefit,—but some day, perfessor, we 'uns 'll git de cost o' dat wah paid off cent fo' cent an' dollar fo' dollar,—an' den we'll rise up an' take our place fo' de nation,—but I reckon it'll jine on close to forty years afore dat gran' settlement be made,—cent fo' cent, an' dollar fo' dollar!" He gazed musingly into the fireplace, his old eyes luminous with prophetic insight.

"You know then,—" cried Stephen, stopping and laying his hand on the elder negro's shoulder, "you know that you're being swindled out of your just earnings?" His companion nodded.

"We knows it, perfessor,—an' we knows it's 'cause o' our ig'rance. An' we knows de han' o' de Lord's a-leadin' us out o' dis ig'rance,—an' He's a keepin' us fo' some gran' purpose o' His'n. Dat's my b'lief, perfessor,—yer done wrong ter try to shake dat b'lief o' mine—I ain't laid it ag'in yer hard, fo' I likes

yer mightily; I loves de soun' o' yer voice, an' de gleam o' '*casional* lightnin' in yer eye. Yo's soun' at heart, boy, but yer ain't got de eye o' faith, fo' yer own people. It's de eye o' faith dat lights up times like dese, when yer heart's mos' broke wid disapp'intment an' mis'ry. Dere's nuffin' like de eye o' faith, perfessor, when yo's cornsiderin' de prospects o' de colored folks!"

Stephen went on pacing the floor; with violent gestures and furious exclamations, he denounced the rapacity of southern land owners and the futility of his own efforts to raise the standards of life under such oppressive conditions. The rebellious spirit of his revolutionary ancestors surged through him; their hatred of injustice swelled his heart until he felt as if it would burst. But suddenly, he stopped short with his hand on his black, woolly head—he saw himself as a naked, painted savage, dashing with uplifted spear through African jungles.—Ah! he must not forget that dreadful picture of his origin! He must not forget the savage within him,—civi-

lization had not yet tamed the beast, apparently!

In passionate contrition, Stephen dropped into a chair and bowed his head upon his hands. He prayed for patience, gentleness, wisdom—and the taming of the African ancestor who now leered upon him from the chancel of his thoughts like some hideous idol. The thought of the naked fellow always brought humiliation. It caused him at once to abandon anger for sharp, rational thinking.

He remembered that ignorance was at the bottom of the whole trouble, and it was ignorance he had come to wrestle with and not the injustice of the southerner to his former slave. If he permitted his mind to dwell on that gloomy picture his usefulness he knew was gone forever. With determination he put the subject out of his thoughts and devoted himself with more energy than ever to the possibilities of building up a new school.

The following week, Stephen inspected the piece of ground that had been offered, and

held another meeting to bring the question again before the people.

The time had come, he thought, to begin work, and he broached the subject to several who had been most enthusiastic in their promises of help. To his sorrow, he found that their enthusiasm had waned. The poor fellows had not yet rallied from the grief caused by their broken hopes over the proceeds of the cotton crop. When Stephen urged them to think of the future of their children they paused and pressed the palms of their hands together in an attitude that was meant to suggest concentration of thought,—but it seemed to indicate rather their own peculiar helplessness,—

“Dat’s de truff, perfessor,—we’d had ought to be considerin’ all dem ’vantages you’s been p’intin’ out—but, sah, our han’s is tied, our han’s is tied!”

Christmas came and there was plenty of leisure; it seemed impossible, however, to get any one just then to take life seriously, but Stephen regarded it so seriously himself

that he started out one day alone, armed with a pick-axe, and began to dig the foundation of his new schoolhouse.

He struck his axe into the ground and turned up the fresh sod along the line he had marked for the foundations of his school. He worked with a will, singing old plantation songs as he swung the pick again and again into the earth. After resting a few moments, he went at it again with breathless energy, and being unable to hold his voice at singing pitch all the while, he accomplished his purpose by a succession of shouts and yells, which speedily brought an astonished pedestrian to the spot.

The first thought of the newcomer was that the "Perfessor" had gone mad. Stephen stopping to wipe his forehead explained pantingly that he had begun to dig the foundations of the new schoolhouse. The neighbor eyed him in open-mouthed stupefaction.

"Ain't yer got a pick at home?" asked Stephen, in piercing accents, content to sacrifice syntax for incisiveness, in his happy con-

sciousness of the better English that was stored away with his Sunday clothes. He was confident that when it was wanted, it would come forth all the better perhaps for being less worn. To his mind, the genius of the English language sanctioned these violent contrasts between academic and colloquial speech, whenever an idea was to be driven quickly and forcibly into a dull understanding.

The newcomer hastened in search of the implements, returning speedily with both axe and shovel. He helped Stephen all the afternoon, and the next morning, he brought a friend with him who also worked with a will. After that there was no scarcity of workers. Every man on the Aikens' plantation donated his quota of labor. Many others who lived on adjoining farms, did the same and Stephen opened his little district school the following Monday in the happy consciousness that a new building was actually under way, and that the whole neighborhood was again in a ferment of enthusiasm over the project.

CHAPTER XVI

It was now nearly two years since Theresa had entered the great colored school.

She had become a hard student and was looking forward to becoming a teacher. Her speech had originally been modeled after the dialect of the ignorant whites in preference to that of the field negroes, but now her quick, imitative faculty,—an individual as well as a racial gift—fashioned it after a higher standard. Her dread of the “nigger school” had vanished on meeting many teachers and pupils in the establishment as fair as herself,—nay, some of them were fairer. She had become a favorite with a teacher known as “Miss Isabel,” a handsome young Virginian, in whose features and coloring there was not the slightest appearance of negro blood. Isabel’s hair was a bright chestnut, her eyes were dark blue, her complexion was that of an English woman. Nevertheless, she was a daughter of

the inferior race and all her associations were with the dusky children of America. Theresa asked her once if she would not prefer to live among the whites, and her reply was given with eyes flashing:

“Why should I care for the people that disown me? They have cast me out, and my loyalty belongs to those who have taken me under their protection. Theresa, white people have heaped dishonor on us—their children! Live among them? Never while there is a black man’s roof to shelter me! I work for the advancement of this race not out of gratitude only—though I owe them much—but that I may some day avenge my own wrongs and all our wrongs!”

“Will you marry a black man, some day, Miss Isabel?” asked Theresa, in a whisper, laying her hand on the sleeve of the elder woman.

“No,” replied the teacher, shortly, drawing a quick breath, “I shall never marry any one, child,—I came into this world to teach, not to marry.”

Theresa thought of her own marriage which was known only to the principal of the school.

"Did you ever hear it said," she whispered, "that I have—a husband?"

Isabel shook her head, laying her hand playfully on the girl's scarlet cheek.

"I have. He's black, Miss Isabel." The piteous expression in Theresa's eyes caused Isabel to clasp the girl's hand in hers.

"Black—really?"

"Brown, I think—no, he's black in summer," whispered Theresa between her fingers, for she had suddenly buried her face in both hands. Isabel longed to know more, so, after a little hesitation, Theresa related the whole story of her secret interviews with her white hero, his base proposition, her intercepted flight to join him, and her unexpected marriage with the negro teacher on the plantation.

Isabel listened breathlessly.

"Couldn't I have been saved without marrying some one else?" cried Theresa, looking

up with wide-open eyes and another deep blush, "why did I *have* to marry Stephen Wells?"

Isabel looked at her in astonishment. "Are you Stephen Wells' wife? I don't pity you one bit. He's *good*, Theresa, and he's not so very black either. Come, let me congratulate you!" she cried, laughing, and looking into Theresa's downcast face.

"I don't care what he's like," muttered Theresa, looking scornful and distressed. "He pays my board, but I am going to earn my way through school now—I can work at dressmaking, and he shall pay no more for me! I don't understand," she went on, impetuously, "why he insisted on my marrying him. I don't think he did right to persuade me to marry him in such a hurry, do you?"

Isabel took thought for a moment.

"From what I know of Stephen," she said, gravely, "I feel sure that he acted from the best of motives. I hear that he's working himself to death over there and has wrought

a great change in your neighborhood. He's full of self-sacrifice."

"Ah! Self-sacrifice!" repeated Theresa, in a strange tone. "Why—do you think—" She flung herself forward into Isabel's lap with a sob. The teacher patted her head tenderly and kissed her.

She continued to caress and soothe her and to call her a silly child until the clock striking nine, announced that it was time to prepare for bed. With a parting kiss she hurried the little wedded maid away to her own apartments, and sat down with a sigh to look over a pile of school exercises.

CHAPTER XVII

NOT many weeks afterward the name of a visitor was brought to Theresa from the office. It was that of Ralph Aikens. She told Isabel whose eyes glowed with anger.

"Well," she asked, coldly, "are you going to see him?"

"I must," was Theresa's half stifled response.

Isabel looked at the burning cheeks and bright eyes of the girl.

"Let me go with you," she cried, impulsively, but Theresa shook her head proudly, and walked out of the schoolroom alone into the small reception parlor, where Ralph sat gazing eagerly at the half open doorway.

She entered slowly with her eyes fixed on the floor. Ralph drew a chair opposite to his own and begged her in a subdued voice to be seated.

Her dread of his brilliant, questioning eyes

drove the color quickly from her cheek, but she seated herself as requested.

He cast toward her a look of eloquent appeal—and he did well to hang his head afterward without a word of greeting. He knew that every sword's point in the girl's nature was turned against him at that moment, but from long experience with the sex, he knew also when to fight and when to throw down his weapons. Theresa eyed him with her usual seriousness, waiting for him to speak. He said at last,

“You did well to fly from me, Theresa, when you understood—what I was capable of.”

The girl's heart beat wildly as Ralph uttered this brief sentence. Quickly leaving her outposts of defence, all her scorn was suddenly lost in a self-reproachful whisper,

“No. I should have known better,—it was my foolish vanity,—thinking myself white!”

“It was your wonderful innocence,—don't blame yourself for that—” cried Ralph, greatly pleased with her self-accusing tones. “To

me it was a beautiful dream with a rude awakening,—do you think me utterly without conscience or heart?”

Theresa had schooled herself exactly to this conclusion, and she now looked toward the open doorway as if seeking an escape from the question.

“I think you were brought up without a conscience toward—such as me,” she said finally in a low voice.

“Toward such as you!” he repeated, with joyous irrelevance. “There is not another like you in the world! You are unique, Theresa!”

The girl sighed as she summed up quaintly from her own experience, the steps of an original and sorrowful deduction:

“That is what turns a woman's head and leads her into folly—it is flattery.”

“So that's what they teach you in this institution, is it?”

“No,—but—they've taught me to know that I'm colored.”

“Oh,—they are giving you a high standard to begin with! They're jealous of your white-

ness, your sweet looks; they want to bring you down to their own low level, but that they can never do. Listen to me. You sweet child, this school is no place for you; I have come here to propose a better plan. I hope you will accept it from me as a sort of atonement—will you?"

"I— What?"

"Don't look so frightened! Am I always to be the villain in the play,—do you look upon me still as a villain?"

"You did do wrong—you tried to make me do wrong!" She turned restlessly on her chair, longing to escape this strange form of persecution. Her color came and went. But Ralph was enjoying the situation, and had no idea of letting her escape from it.

"I did do wrong, and I tried to make you do wrong, as you say, and failed—thank heaven,—but now that I confess my sin, is there no forgiveness for me?"

"Forgiveness?" repeated the girl, in a softened tone, "I never thought—yes—we must forgive our enemies."

"I am my own worst enemy, I know that—" he added, with a singular smile and a peculiar shadow in his eyes,—“but I don't exist for your injury any more. I am seeking your good at the present moment. Listen; this is my plan: I want to send you to a young ladies' boarding-school in the North, where you will be highly educated with white girls. You can stay there until you are fully equipped to teach anything you want,—music, singing, painting, dancing—whatever you care most to learn. And I shall not trouble you with my presence. You can accept it without any fear of me, Theresa. It will give me great happiness to do this for you. Say that you will go!”

“I *can't* say it,” cried Theresa, the tears rushing suddenly to her eyes. “I belong here—I must stay with my race. What good would it do to educate me like a white woman when I can never live among white people? You have made all the atonement necessary. I know you are sorry for me. I can see in your face that you have changed. I believe you

have a noble, tender heart. I do not need to say 'I forgive'— It was not all your fault. I know the degradation of my people,—and the way you were taught to look down on them. It was part of your education to believe—to think—that you could not make me—any worse than I was—" The look of adoration that he so well remembered crept into her eyes. She checked herself suddenly and stood looking at him with parted lips and crimson cheeks. He stepped toward her with a passionate gesture.

"It sets me crazy to see you standing there making excuses for me! Forgive me, do you? I'll never forgive the laws of this cursed country! If there's any nobility here, it's come since I've known you. I've been a reckless, lawless fellow all my life, caring nothing for the laws of God or man—I've sought my own pleasure always—at any cost. Do you want to know the whole truth about it? I never said I loved you, did I? Perhaps you didn't notice that I never came right straight out with it,—I let you assume it. That was part of the shamefulness

of the whole thing,—but now here's the truth,—I do love you dearly,—whatever you are, just as you stand there. And what's more, I always did—” In another second Ralph would have seized her hands if she had not drawn quickly away. She reached the door so that escape was easy, but instead of flying from the room, she turned toward him a face pale, yet radiant with tender resolution. He stopped in obedience to its powerful protest.

“Hush—I've no right to listen—I will not listen! Do you hear that bell? It means evening service. Come with me—oh, come and see—my people; then you will understand. It's a short service, and perhaps you will like the music. Yes,—you had better come.”

As she led the way immediately, Ralph could do nothing but follow her through the long corridor into the open air outside. They walked together silently until Theresa stopped before the door of a large hall, the dimensions of which extended vaguely into the night. As they entered, Ralph's first impression was that of the primitive circus tent of his boyhood.

The place was dimly lighted by small kerosene lamps fastened to the walls and posts. The building was an immense shed; the ground was covered with sawdust and boarded only in the narrow aisles leading to a raised platform. Students were filing in unceremoniously and seating themselves on boards laid across low wooden supports.

All was confusion for a few minutes as Theresa led the way toward the platform on which stood a reading desk. She waited to see Ralph seat himself on a bench intended for visitors, and then quickly withdrew.

Ralph looked with curiosity not unmingled with contempt at the rude simplicity of this "Hall of Worship." It had every appearance of having been put up for temporary convenience. The size of it was astonishing, but not more so than the number of students that now filled the benches as far back as he could see. Their black faces seemed to absorb what little light there was, and the whites of their eyes gleamed solemnly in the smoky twilight of an insufficient number of oil lamps.

He raised his eyes to the roof and observed that the interior was draped profusely with red, white and blue bunting. The upright posts which supported the roof were festooned with the same colors, and back of him two American flags were crossed against the wall.

His Southern blood resented these evidences of excessive patriotism which seemed to suggest that the dusky children seated below had a special claim to the protection of the flag. While he sat frowning at the thought, some one advanced to the reading desk and began a simple prayer. At its conclusion, from an unknown quarter came what sounded like the low notes of a Gregorian chant; beginning almost in a whisper, it was quickly taken up by other female voices until it rose into an organ-like hymn of thanksgiving:

“My Lord, what a morning when de stars begin to fall!
You hear de trumpets sound
To wake de nations under de ground.
Look in my Lord’s right hand
When de stars begin to fall!”

It was an old plantation melody and died away as softly as it had begun.

Ralph tried in vain to discover the singers, fancying that he had recognized Theresa's voice among the sopranos.

The service was short and closed with another plantation hymn called "Climbin' Jacob's Ladder." The words were comparatively meaningless, but the music was indeed a ladder of harmonies. It began in a wail of despair and rose in successive climaxes higher and higher until the voices seemed to touch the roof in a cry of religious exaltation.

Through the influence of this remarkable music Ralph's spirit was thrilled into silence. He closed his eyes and the magic art of the singers brought a strange picture before his mind. There stood before him a massive, high cross—doubtless, the cross of Calvary—and against it leaned a great ladder. At the foot of the cross lay numerous sufferers with their arms raised appealingly. Their wailing cry was in his ears; it was taken up by others who stood on the ladder and were slowly,

painfully, climbing upward. Undoubtedly, they had all been sufferers together, but some had escaped and were now high above the ground. When the cry of those below became most distressing, the climbers hesitated and looked back. Then slowly they retraced their steps and stooping down, lifted the prostrate ones and tenderly assisted them to climb too. As they mounted the ladder thus together with surprising ease and swiftness, their voices blended, the sobbing wail became a cry of triumphant faith; they passed up and onward, and vanished from his sight!

Ralph opened his eyes and the real scene before him gained suddenly an impressive significance. The dusky young faces,—all wearing as it were impenetrable masks,—seemed to be gazing backward into their extraordinary history; their eyes were saying with pathetic patience,

“We know all that we have suffered—we do not forget. But everything will be made clear and every wrong righted, when our God

leads us by the hand into the place where He intends us to be."

Ralph became dimly aware that their musical art was an expression of spiritual power. He stared furtively about him during the closing prayer and tried to understand something of what must be the feeling of these dark-skinned children of America for the stars and stripes. The flag had so far fulfilled their most daring prophecies; it was at once the symbol of their faith and the interpreter of their largest hope.

As the students filed out two by two, crossing the platform directly in front of him to march down the right aisle and out the door, the sight of the familiar woolly heads and homely black features recalled his habitual derisive attitude toward the race. The influence of the music died away; he looked at them coldly as before—until startled by the sight of many fair faces among them.

The sting of shame then entered his heart as he counted one face after another that had strong claim to the recognition of the whites

through ties of blood. There was abundant evidence that the black and the white races had mingled, and that one race was bearing the unlawful burdens of both. Ralph groaned inwardly as Theresa passed him accompanied by a young girl fairer than herself though less beautiful. With what proud humility did those white children move among their dark sisters!—"I am with you but not one of you," each seemed to say.

The meeting was over. Theresa had disappeared, and Ralph made his way disconsolately back to the town with his heart full of pain and discontent.

CHAPTER XVIII

It was now possible to hold school in the new, shining, frame building which had become the glory of the neighborhood. The Thomas' Mills people had been unable to resist its charms and petitioned to send their children to the "'Cad'my," accepting with gratitude the privilege of contributing toward its support. They gave up their separate school and had the divided fund restored to its original amount.

Pupils flocked to it from many miles around. Already the school-roll numbered over one hundred. An assistant teacher was an absolute necessity, yet the field-hands were bearing as heavy a burden as they could carry in paying off gradually the cost of material and the purchase of the land on which the school stood.

The early summer found Stephen on his way to the North, fired with an ambition to

raise the needed funds either by his own labor, or by appealing to the fabulous generosity of Northern philanthropists in whose goodness he believed as implicitly as he did in the articles of the Christian religion.

He stepped out of the colored coach at Washington,—he might have left it earlier if he had been so minded, but his thoughts were not on distinctions of race—and on entering the train of the Pennsylvania Railroad he was somewhat abashed to find himself the only colored man in the car. He selected a seat near the door conspicuous for its discomfort, and as the car filled up, one traveler after another approached him, hesitated, looked at him and passed on into the next car. But Stephen's feelings were not hurt by the fact that he was permitted on account of his color to occupy a seat intended for two. He looked steadily out of the window, having shrunk into the smallest space that it was possible for him to fit into after laying his bag on the floor. Strange to say, he was light-hearted over the situation, and pondered with a keen relish the disinterested-

ness of Northern justice which now permitted him to remain where he was not wanted, after fighting bloody battles to bestow on him this unique privilege.

"After all," he reflected, "there is more safety in justice than in sentiment. It is all we have a right to ask,—it's all we need pray for." The simple fellow! As if he could have asked for a more extravagant thing than justice!

At Philadelphia, he got off and spent several days looking up wealthy philanthropists. Most of them lived out of town or had recently moved out. They were generally inaccessible, but patient enough when once run down and cornered. A few of them had agents to whom the solicitous were referred. He felt sure that the sole duty of these odious persons consisted in refusing everybody with Spartan-like firmness, for he could read a refusal in their eyes before he began his plea. These creatures were unskilled in a knowledge of human nature; they attempted no investigation into his merits; they heard him out with

unchanging countenances and shut the door on his hopes without a sign of relief or regret. He learned soon to avoid them. The philanthropists themselves were easily enough bored, but they were vulnerable in spots, many seeming to find it easier to give than to refuse, because it offered a prompt and certain way of ending the interview. They appeared to live through such interviews in a state of suspended animation, like fish that had been drawn out of water, and Stephen used to feel that it was only the blessed hope of getting rid of him that kept the poor, gasping gentlemen alive through the brief interval of his coming and going. He felt sorry for them and wondered they did not all employ agents to refuse for them,—and then he felt sorry for himself, because, having spent so much time and money running in and out of the city in pursuit of these lifeless objects, he had secured only a few dollars to show for his indefatigable efforts.

He thought it strange that so many of these gentlemen were already patrons of other col-

ored schools—even of his own Sectarian College—and yet were so indifferent to his mission. He was slow to learn that benefactors as a class suffer acute distress in the presence of their beneficiaries; that the first object of all endowments for the care of unfortunates is to keep them out of sight; the fact of their miserable existence adds lustre only to the pages of an annual report.

Moreover, he but dimly discerned what may be described as the national attitude of the average white American toward the black. For thirty years it has been his habit of mind to look over, by or beyond the black man, but never at him. Though northern cities may teem with representatives of the liberated race, the white American of the North knows the black only by the dreadful things he reads about him in southern despatches.

It will thus be seen that the sudden appearance of this very dark young man in the offices of our worthy philanthropists caused a double embarrassment and a complication of painful sensations. These poor gentlemen suffered

from the unpleasantness of meeting one of their beneficiaries face to face,—and they were torn with the peculiar anguish that only a white American feels on being forced to contemplate the living, breathing proof of a national problem that he is determined to ignore.

After the second week's experience Stephen put away his letters of introduction and sauntered about the city thinking what he should do next.

The voices of children singing in a public school attracted his attention and he entered the building to hear their recitations. The teacher made him welcome and gave him a chair. The school was overcrowded, and he marveled at the precision and orderliness of the pupils. They recited several lessons aided by maps, globes, charts and clay models. When the bell rang, they marched like veteran soldiers on parade, and Stephen was deeply impressed by all the methods employed. He told the schoolmistress in his best English that he had never seen before such a system of object lessons.

The young woman stated pleasantly that the system had been taught for years in all the public schools,—it was not new, in fact, it was rather old-fashioned; in Boston there was a method now in vogue, which she hoped would soon be introduced into Philadelphia. She mentioned it by what seemed to him an unpronounceable name, and asked if he did not think it superior to another, the name of which was equally unfamiliar to him. He confessed his ignorance humbly. To cover his embarrassment, she went on talking in her alert, crisp fashion, comparing the various methods in use for years past and commenting on the choice of text-books in her school. As she named them, Stephen was forced to admit that many of the titles were new to him. But as the schoolmistress talked on good-naturedly, pouring volumes of information into his eager ears, Stephen took out a little notebook and jotted down what seemed to him the chief points. He thought her very kind; she seemed to overlook his color, and to address herself to the teacher in him, but his

heart sank lower and lower during her discourse, for it seemed that he had never before realized his unfitness for the task he had undertaken. What miracles might not such a one as this schoolmistress have worked among his poor people in the Black Belt! Finally his spirit groaned aloud in these words:

"You must excuse my ignorance, lady—it's the fault of my race to be superficial. We are easily satisfied with a smattering of knowledge and think we know it all. That's why we make so little progress."

The bitter humility of the dark skinned stranger evidently touched her, for she answered with a look of kindness into the grey eyes that seemed to be peering at her through a black mask—Stephen now being blacker than usual after his experience in the cotton-fields:

"I wouldn't blame my race, if I were you, for faults that are common to human nature. It's all a matter of training. I've been drilled in these methods all my life; I didn't originate them. Where did you study?" Stephen named the Sectarian College, and was sur-

prised that she had never heard of it. He had always thought it the greatest institution of learning in the world!

He took heart again and confided to her some of his experiences as a teacher in the South, but all the conditions of life had to be explained from the beginning. When he told her about his beloved "Academy," and how it had been started and built, she cried out with enthusiasm that it was magnificent—wonderful! Stephen left her greatly soothed and encouraged. He promised to write to her of the progress of his school, and she volunteered to interest her friends and pupils in its welfare. How much better was she, he thought, than the philanthropists! How munificent was her sympathy, in comparison with their niggardly supply! But I am willing to admit that he did the real lovers of humanity an injustice; it was simply his misfortune to have come across spurious specimens. The real ones still exist, winding their way in and out of the crowded ranks of humanity like angels with folded wings, which even

great riches cannot soil or clog. And some of them dare even to look the national problem squarely in the face!

Stephen's interview with the schoolmistress remained fixed in his memory, and yielded ever afterward a secret pleasing excitement whenever he recalled it. It was seldom that one of his race met one of hers on such a plane of common interest—and the Anglo-Saxon in him yearned often for communion with the superb mental endowments of the superior race. Secretly in his boyhood days, he had built air-castles in which high-minded white individuals would converse with him freely—mistaking him in the darkness of a railway car or similar place for a white man—even to the extent of offering him social privileges which he would of course modestly, honorably, firmly decline. The biting injustice of the white American's customary attitude would then be finely exposed, when the superior being would discover his mistake—after receiving an object lesson which would of course induce him to cast out forever the

thick film of race prejudice with which his eyes were blinded.

But such episodes existed so far only in Stephen's imagination, and he was therefore the more grateful to the schoolmistress for her absence of condescension in the broad light of day.

CHAPTER XIX

ALTHOUGH Stephen was a good penman, an accurate accountant and a clever carpenter, he was too well acquainted with the peculiar form of race prejudice in the North to waste time seeking employment in any of these lines. Through the efforts of a friend, he secured a position as waiter in a large summer hotel situated at a fashionable seaside resort, and as it was now open and guests were pouring in plentifully, his services began without delay.

Stephen had never "waited" before in a professional sense, but this humble waiting on individuals instead of on time and opportunity seemed to him only a more acute stage of his chronic condition.

Some of his comrades were wild young blacks who shifted from city to city in winter and from mountain to seashore in summer. The habits of these individuals were extrava-

gant; but others were sedate young fellows intent on making hay while their brief summer sun shone. All of them, however, were good-natured, and they gave Stephen invaluable points in the science of remembering orders, serving dishes, carrying heavy trays, and bowing with exquisite grace. Some of the men were graduates of training schools established for the industrial development of the race. They had become skilled craftsmen and were striking examples of the satirical benevolence of the North which bestows the handsome accomplishment of a trade on a black, and then commands him to starve or steal rather than live by it. That these individuals had succeeded in prolonging their existence without either starving or stealing was certainly a proof of their ingenuity. We need not lose self-esteem by giving them credit for ingenuity.

The head-waiter was a graduate of Harvard and had been selected with great care, not because of his Greek and Hebrew accomplishments (of which the proprietor indeed knew

nothing) but because his honesty was unquestioned, his habits beyond reproach, and his command of men, napkins and china equal to that of a great general over an army. His name was Henry Howards; he was a coal-black negro of good height and heavy build; his expression was thoughtful and his smile pleasing. Stephen looked up to him as a man of profound learning and was delighted when Howards condescended to notice him, and invited him more than once to spend an evening in his room.

Stephen served at a table monopolized by a wealthy Boston family by the name of Ormsby; he understood vaguely that they were great people in the social world, and he heard them described also as philanthropists. The term made him quake in his low shoes, for he still believed that the future of his race lay in the hands of this class.

Accordingly he ran his legs off cheerfully to obtain for the Ormsbys the hottest rolls and the choicest lamb chops, and in every way presented himself to their languid perceptions

as a being whose head had grown to one side in an anxious stoop to receive their indistinct commands. Such a beneficent adaptation of means to an end may possibly have required a special act of creation—of which the Ormsbys doubtless believed they were deemed not unworthy.

In the evening the waiters sat together in the kitchen and displayed their social graces in various ways. They were quite as merry notwithstanding their hard work, as the guests in the hotel parlor; in fact, I do not know that they were not merrier for they had such good stories to tell of the number of dishes ordered by the great ones of the earth, the amount they devoured, the absurdity of their complaints, and the gossip that was repeated at their tables.

As the men were excellent singers, Howards one day suggested that they should give a concert for the benefit of Stephen's school.

The day on which the performance was to be given, every waiter laid an assortment of

tickets and programs on the table before the guests had assembled. During the dinner Stephen's hopes ran high for he heard enough to know that the programs were read aloud amid laughter and comment. He brought on the dessert with a beating heart and hastened after the coffee. On his return he found words to make a short plea in behalf of his school.

Mrs. Ormsby drank her coffee and addressing the coffee-pot, observed that she had once been a great friend of the negro but had now come to the conclusion that a great deal of money had been thrown away on educating him above his position. The race had become shiftless and good-for-nothing. The colored people needed to be made to work. Freedom had done them no good.

Stephen fixed his grey eyes haughtily upon her. He answered in utter defiance of every precedent in his experience as a menial:

"My people have never eaten bread that they've not earned,—they've paid double the price for every mouthful that the white man has paid!"

The great lady stared, rose majestically from her seat and swept out of the room. He learned later from one of his comrades who had been summoned to the parlor on an errand, that she expressed her indignation at great length to sympathetic circles in the parlor, and declared it to be her choice henceforth to be surrounded and served by members of her own race. Howards reproved him severely for his folly.

“You might as well invite an iceberg to roll over you, and expect to melt it with your fiery heart. Keep out of the way of icebergs! All humanity flees from them—and are *you* going to block their progress?”

The upshot of it was that nearly all the guests with the exception of the nurses and children stayed away from the concert. The receipts amounted to next to nothing, and Stephen went to bed that night with his hopes crushed. To add to his depression, the evening papers told a terrible tale of massacre in one of the southern states—the victims being as usual, accused, untried, defenceless blacks.

He hugged his pillow with angry eyes, and tossed in sorrow and despair many hours. What was to become of his school if money could not be raised for it in the North,—ay,—what was to become of his race if the whole nation turned against it with the cold scorn of Mrs. Ormsby and her friends?

At last he fell asleep and dreamed that he was clinging to the steep, rocky side of a mountain; his hands clutched rootless shrubs and saplings, his feet were planted in loose gravel. Vainly he sought a path upward. A rushing noise was in his ears. He looked above him and saw a handsomely painted car, decorated with flags and banners, descending toward him on an inclined plane which made a sharp curve just below his feet.

Fascinated by its swift, even motion, he gazed eagerly, and beheld a group of noble-looking men and women on the front platform; the central figure—an ideal of majestic womanhood—was robed in white and wore a shining coronet of braided yellow hair.

As the car drew nearer, Stephen believed its

occupants were coming to rescue him from his perilous position. It was advancing with terrific speed—it was rushing almost upon him—it entered the curve at his feet—and then his astonished eyes saw distinctly that the faces of the group on the platform were blanched with terror. The rushing wind was sweeping their hair backward, and wrapping their garments tightly about their trembling limbs; the eyes of every member of the group were fixed and staring—full of an awful dread!

As the car swung around the curve, Stephen knew that all was lost,—the motorman had lost his grip, the car could never round that curve in safety—it was tearing headlong to destruction. He closed his eyes that he might not witness the fearful catastrophe—but was forced to open them quickly. With a frightful crash, followed by shrieks and groans of anguish, the car plunged off the track, and now lay overturned—a shapeless pile of broken, smoking timber on the mountain-side.

What had become of the unfortunate occu-

pants and especially of that noble group on the front platform? He leaned forward, his eyes streaming with pity, longing to help, but unable to stir from the spot.

Far down the mountain-side, there emerged from the wreck some signs of life. Whitish, shapeless creatures were creeping slowly from under the broken timbers and making their way back to the inclined plane; they were followed by others still creeping on their hands and knees. It was a pitiful sight,—nay, it was sickening! More and more of them came creeping—creeping—back to the track until they resembled a herd of—*what?* No longer could he deceive himself: the sight froze his blood—those creeping things were not human beings,—they were a herd of swine rushing violently down a steep place into the sea! He saw them leap by sixes and dozens madly into the black waters at the foot of the mountain!

In his dream, this discovery was followed by a fit of cold horror, from which he passed into convulsive sobbing and weeping,—and in this state he awoke.

The night was still dark; a storm was raging; his small attic room was illuminated by flashes of lightning; thunderbolts seemed falling all about him. He saw again the advancing car, its waving banners, its group of brave men and women,—and in the darkness, there was suddenly blazed upon his mental vision an inscription which he had failed to notice on the platform in his dream, but which he now beheld there distinctly:

“Anglo-Saxon Civilization.”

The meaning of it all was perfectly clear to him: the white man’s civilization was to be destroyed—even the advance guard was doomed and moving rapidly toward its fate.

The anti-climax of the swine—arranged with devilish glee by the arch-fiend himself to belittle the sufferings which the dream portrayed—gave the finishing touch to the whole hideous catastrophe,—it was this that almost broke his heart. He cried out suddenly,

“Spare them,—O God, spare Thy favored race, and let them not be laid in the dust that

the devils may enter their souls and rush them into the sea as swine—as swine!”

He sat up in bed and stretched out his arms, moved by some violent emotion—some deep spring of racial affinity. The thought of the possible downfall of the great superior race filled him with an overwhelming sorrow—it was more than he could bear. Gladly, he would have died to save them!

When the storm of his emotion had died away, he tried vainly to account for its intensity on the ground of a universal humanity. It left him calm and passionless; he beheld without pain the floating wreck of his broken hopes for his own race. For the time being, his hopes possessed no significance to him. Nothing mattered, after all, he reflected, in dull despondency,—and soon afterward, he fell asleep.

CHAPTER XX

A LETTER from Theresa, returning the amount he had forwarded for her board, threw Stephen into still greater despondency. He had committed, he believed, a colossal blunder in his hasty marriage. He had deeply wronged the innocent young girl by hurrying her into a union which was now uncongenial to her. In rejecting the small sum he had hitherto contributed toward her support, she meant to indicate her desire for independence. The tie was irksome already. Well, it was only nominal and perhaps some legal technicality might be found to sever it. He thought of her often, but always as a fair jewel that he had stolen and that was too fine and delicate to adorn his life of drudgery. He could be of little service to her. As yet he was a dismal failure, bringing ruin to his friends on the cotton-field, and unhappiness to Theresa.

"I am an unfortunate fellow," he said,

gloomily, to Howards, "born of a vanishing race, what can I hope to accomplish? There is no future for us either in the North or the South."

"We're not vanishing very fast," replied the head-waiter, with a grim smile, "we've more than doubled our numbers since the war. Our increasing ratio is our strongest point. It's true that savage races cannot survive contact with civilization, but we have proved that we were made for civilization, Stephen, my boy."

"I used to feel sure," said Stephen, "that we were made for some great purpose,—that God led us into slavery to set us free in the heart of this great nation because He had a noble destiny planned for us, but of late, I've begun to doubt if we were meant for anything but to be wiped out of existence. We're behind every other race. They say down South in their newspapers that we've been behind for thousands of years, and that we always were incapable of rising to the dignity of a nation."

"That's saying too much," observed How-

ards, dispassionately. "Back of a few hundred years they know nothing of our history. It's true we figure on the Egyptian monuments as prisoners of war, with chains around our necks, but that only proves that we were enough of a nation for the great Egyptians to go to war with. The Bible speaks of the Ethiopians as a powerful people who were always at war with the Egyptians. Of course, *we* were that people."

"Then we've degenerated since," said Stephen, lowering his grey eyes.

"I don't know about that. It was a barbarous, imperfect kind of civilization that all nations shared in those days. You know it takes centuries to develop the feeblest approach to civilization in primitive man. Living under rude conditions and exposed to constant dangers, the little he builds up one day is torn down the next by surrounding tribes whose status is lower than his own. The heart of Africa is strewn with the wrecks of our ancestors' attempts at civilization. The tribes of to-day are constantly approaching the same

goal and constantly being driven away. Man's attempt to climb upward is like the spider's effort to build a web. Many failures to one success. Finally when he does succeed, it is due to some fortunate combination of circumstances which preserves his puny efforts instead of obliterating them."

"But see how rapidly European civilization has advanced within a few hundred years," said Stephen, after a moment's silence. "Why hasn't our race accomplished as much in the same time?"

"When Egypt, Persia, Greece, and Rome were in their prime, why did European civilization wait a thousand years and more for its development? Because the favorable conditions of climate, security from savage invasion and contact with more advanced nations had not yet been realized. I believe that if we can preserve our racial type distinct, the development of the black man will come in time—but there's the rub; it will not come, I fear, through a mixture of blood. However, oppression is forcing us into individuality and

self-reliance. There's nothing like persecution to develop a race. Don't be discouraged; our star is rising, not setting."

"But we are mixed already," said Stephen, ruefully; "some say that not a full-blooded African remains in this country."

"I confess that the white man has overruled my objection and established that point in my favor," replied Howards, laughing.

"By his own decree, the white strain counts for nothing even in the proportion of six to one,—by which I suppose he means that in the making of a race, environment counts six times more than heredity. Heaven knows our environment is distinct enough, even though our blood borrows heavily from all the Caucasian races,—including the Anglo-Saxon."

"Ah, the Anglo-Saxon!" cried Stephen, brightening, "if we had only enough of *him* in us, we would long ago have overcome all the obstacles that fate has placed in our path!" Then he thought of his dream—and winced visibly.

"Yes, the Anglo-Saxon," repeated Howards,

thoughtfully, "he has filled in well the gap between the ancient and the modern world. He has made a good bridge—all iron, steel, granite, muscle and mechanical skill—all good things in a bridge! And humanity's feet are plodding heavily over it toward—the better things beyond."

"What better things lie beyond the Anglo-Saxon and his 'bridge,' as you call it? I should be well satisfied if you and I could set our feet on that 'bridge,' and stay there forever—with our whole race!" Stephen rose impetuously from his chair, flung himself about, and sat down again.

"I was looking far ahead," explained Howards gently—"very far across the centuries—and I confess that I was thinking of standards higher than are known to-day,—of an ideal justice, for instance, not known to any race,—no not to the Anglo-Saxon! It is a notion of mine that in the distant future, races that have suffered like ours, and that have never had a chance to maltreat a so-called inferior race,—will be likely to evolve a higher sense of jus-

tice than the Anglo-Saxon mind is capable of. May it not be our destiny to perfect at last this noble sense of justice, through the development in us of a far-seeing patience? How can an impatient people execute justice? And are we not patient? And is not the Anglo-Saxon—and especially the American type—peculiarly impatient? We know that God Himself is patient! Why may we not claim this trait as a racial gift—the first strand in the new bridge that is to be thrown across for the dark races!”

Stephen looked at him in wonder. Howards' words, his serene philosophical manner, his deep-seated pervasive faith, produced on the younger man's imagination a vision of something unique and extraordinarily inspiring. For a second, he gazed before him in breathless admiration—almost in awe. Were his eyes beholding an ideal of black culture, which could hold its worth in direct contrast to the white man's ideal, even as an ebony crucifix holds its beauty by the side of an ivory one?

"They will force us into it!" was his sudden, bewildering conviction, "we who were meant to be only the complement of the white races, to follow where they lead, to reach our development through service to them—we are to be forced into racial competition, into this unequal struggle—God help us!"

His soul was in torment—his thoughts too strange and deep for expression. Again he looked at Howards who sat apparently unmoved by the Frankenstein vision that his own words had created. What a curious spectacle he presented—this specimen of black solidarity, this humblest type of human creature, wrapped—from his skin out—in social degradation, yet daring to peer through the darkness into futurity, and believing that he saw therein a glorified image of himself thrown on the distant centuries!

"It's ready—my conscience, but you fellows have an easy time of it!" said the cook, poking his head through a side doorway and glaring at them with smoky, fiery eyes.

"We are the most visionary people on

earth!" sighed Stephen, tying a long white apron round his waist, "isn't that so?"

"It's good to see visions, sometimes," said Howards, the unabashed.

This conversation was held in the dining-room after the tables were set for dinner and while Howards was awaiting a signal from the cook that the meal was ready to be served. As he spoke, he threw open the dining-room doors and bade Stephen sound the gong to notify the guests. There was no opportunity for further remarks.

As the guests poured into the large room, Mrs. Ormsby and her family appeared in readiness to depart after dinner. The lady, magnificently clad and looking very tall and stately, rustled up to Stephen who was standing in the doorway, looking very spare, dark and insignificant. She placed in his hand a cheque, saying impressively,

"This is for your school. You are a good waiter; I did not understand at first that there were *industrial* features. It is a worthy object."

Stephen bowed and the lady swept by him toward the dinner-table. Having satisfied her New England conscience, she could depart with a tranquil mind. But there was still a mission to be performed on behalf of the proprietor. She sought him out after the meal.

“Our best hotels on the New England coast do not employ colored waiters, nor do private families select colored coachmen,—did you know that?”

“Well, perhaps by next year, madam—”

“I may not be here next year—but you can let me know. Good-bye.” Her cultured voice rang in his ears, penetrating his brain—down to his pockets.

The summer crowd came and went in a succession of strange faces. Finally the seats around the table were filled by a cheerful family of Longacres from Philadelphia. They addressed each other in the Friends’ dialect, but they were not strict Quakers, for they wore the garb of the world modified by an inherited love of quiet colors. Stephen took a mighty fancy to them. The tones of their

voices were human and natural—even when ordering hot buttered toast. They looked at him as if they really saw him, and not as if he were a mere abstraction of social inferiority. In the service of these bright lovable people Stephen forgot his heartaches. He adored their little jokes and the exchange of playful repartee between the sisters, and when they smiled at him a “good-morning,” the world grew fresh and young again and the poor lad laid aside his burden of racial responsibilities as long as they remained in the dining-room.

They came to stay only two weeks, but in that short time he learned all their individual preferences. When the elder daughter asked him what he intended to do on leaving the hotel (possibly with a situation in view for him in her own household) Stephen told her about his school and what had brought him to the North. He was delighted to show her a photograph of the new building. Finally he opened his heart and related his experience with the Ormsby family. His story moved Miss Longacre to deep interest, and when she

left the room she carried with her the photograph and circulars.

That evening the young black was invited to address an informal gathering in the hotel parlor on the subject of his "Academy." There was printed on his mind a picture of those degraded, ignorant field-hands leaving their field tasks at sunset to toil patiently over the building of the school by twilight or moonlight in the hope of educating their children and advancing their race—and somehow his stumbling tongue found words to paint this picture on the minds of his listeners.

A few days later, when the Longacre family made ready to depart, the old Quaker laid in his hand a check for two hundred dollars. He offered further to advise Stephen from time to time on financial matters.

"We're not without friends after all!" said Stephen in a low voice to Howards as he passed him with a heavy tray in his hands, "our race is going to march on. All we need is patience!"

"I'm in luck too," said the head-waiter, af-

terward, when they were alone. "Here is my appointment as professor of History and Social Science. I applied several months ago and was beginning to lose hope." He showed Stephen a letter from the president of a well-known colored "University,"—wherein one might receive a high-school education combined with a divinity student's training. It was a day of great rejoicing,

Howards left a week later and Stephen took his place until fall. When he left for the South, he had earned more than enough to pay his traveling expenses, and he carried with him a modest bank account on behalf of his school, sufficient to pay its running expenses for several months.

He found there had been great changes during his absence. Colonel Aikens' wife had died; the colonel had gone abroad and Ralph was in charge of the estate. He was living in the old manor-house. Theresa had returned from the Normal School and was at home with her grandfather.

CHAPTER XXI

LEMUEL and his grandfather celebrated Theresa's return by building another room to their little cabin. It was a new Theresa who now appeared in the humble doorway. She reminded Ralph Aikens of an exquisite flower waiting to be plucked from its mean surroundings, and placed in a gorgeous vase for the admiration of men. The squalid homeliness of the negro's cabin made him shudder when he passed by, and saw Theresa tying up vines over the doorway, weeding flower-beds, and otherwise occupying herself in adorning her home. He passed by very often and found many an excuse for stopping to exchange a few words with her, but they were brief interviews, for Theresa found something usually that demanded her attention indoors.

Equally fleeting were the glimpses which Stephen caught of his young wife. He saluted

her with great reverence when he called, but his business was always with Wesley, with whom he discussed at length the affairs of the school.

Later in the season Isabel arrived from the Normal School and assisted Stephen in teaching. She stayed at the Anderson cabin and shared Theresa's room. At her suggestion Theresa was engaged to teach the younger scholars, and this honor filled the girl with delight. At the school she saw more of Stephen, but their intercourse was formal, and a painful shyness seemed to prevent his referring to their unfortunate marriage. He felt weighted to the earth with the burdens of his race, and committed to a life of economy and self-sacrifice. Although he had often dreamed of the sweetness of having Theresa share that life with him, he now pushed the thought away as presumptuous. He told himself that his marriage was a mistake; that missionaries should be celibates. Dependent as they were on philanthropy for means to continue their costly experiments, what right had they to

add the support of a family to the heavy burden of their indebtedness? By such arguments Stephen sought to deaden his affections, and prepare himself to live his life without Theresa. But there were times when his heart passionately rebelled and cried out for the love of her whom he had saved, and who shared, as he believed, the blood of his race, and the dark problems of its history.

At the suggestion of Mr. Longacre, Stephen and Wesley Anderson organized an Agricultural Society to study improved methods of farming. The association held frequent meetings in the schoolhouse and great projects were under discussion from time to time. The most important of these was a plan to purchase land which was to be sold to the members in small lots, and paid for gradually, so that in time they might own their own homes. There was great enthusiasm over the project. Mr. Longacre became their largest stockholder and sent them valuable advice on the subject.

But when the officers of the association

made known their desire to purchase land, not an acre was found for sale in any direction. So the tenants were forced to remain tenants still, and to continue to work under the objectionable mortgage system. This kept them poor and at the mercy of their landlords. The school was flourishing as far as numbers were concerned, but like everything else in the South, it ran on the credit system and it seemed impossible to keep it out of debt.

The hope of buying land did not die out however in Stephen's mind. The money that was subscribed for the purpose was held intact, and he hoped that sooner or later some planter would relent or would yield to necessity and part with a small portion of land at the high price the association was willing to pay for it. It was known that several were anxious to sell to buyers of the right complexion.

Finally the association authorized a white lawyer from Perryville to buy for them on a handsome commission. There seemed to be a fair prospect that this would succeed. One

of the planters consented at last to part with seventy-five acres. The lawyer drew up the deeds of purchase and all that was wanting was the signature of the present owner.

Stephen, Wesley Anderson and the Reverend Mr. Simpson went to the lawyer's office bearing a tightly rolled document proudly in their hands. But the lawyer was away from home. His agent met them on the threshold and explained civilly that young Mr. Aikens had been over the day before and had bought the property at a higher figure than the association offered. Sorrowfully the trio returned to their cabins, and later they paid the treacherous lawyer a neat little sum for his services, though confident that he had sold out their interests to Colonel Aikens. Altogether it was a profitable little transaction for the Perryville lawyer, and a rather costly one for young Aikens.

Not long after this, Stephen passed by the Anderson cabin and saw Theresa standing by her flower-bed. Close beside her stood Ralph holding his black horse by the bridle. They

remained in conversation for some time, as Stephen returning later from his errand found him still standing there. His heart sank with gloomy forebodings of evil. Ralph had become to him a bird of evil omen, a creature fraught with iniquitous purposes, and he knew that his opportunities for inflicting injury on the helpless were many and varied. The Andersons were wholly within his power as far as their worldly interests were concerned. They could be dispossessed of all they had at his word.

But the fierce pain in Stephen's heart was not due wholly to his dread of Ralph's presumably iniquitous purposes. He was conscious again and again of a passionate longing to claim Theresa as his wife—and this was followed always by a sickening sense of incapacity and defeat. Theresa sitting on the low steps of her grandfather's cabin, seemed farther from him than if she were at the Normal School. All the grace and culture that had come to her through his arduous efforts only placed her further beyond his reach. The nearer she

approached the lovely standards of accomplished white womanhood, the more did Stephen shrink under the degradation of his dark skin and deem himself unworthy even to touch her hand. He tried to deaden the soreness of his heart in work, and rushed to his task with a determination to drive sentiment out of his life.

Ralph had called, however, on what was meant to be a kindly errand. He had come to give Theresa a word of warning concerning the school. She knew of course the attitude of the poor whites of that neighborhood. The new teacher had excited their displeasure by his efforts to buy land for the colored people. Ralph said any planter who would sell land to the association would run the risk of having his house burned or his horses maimed; the feeling on the subject was strong. He thought the association made a mistake in holding so many meetings in the building. It made the whites suspicious. They feared the negroes were plotting against them.

"I dare say everything they do is most commendable," said Ralph, "but you know you can't reason with these 'crackers' on that subject. I wish you were not teaching in the school, Theresa. They may attack this ambitious pedagogue some day,—I wish you would let me find you a position in one of the city schools. I don't like the idea of your exposing yourself to danger."

"I don't believe there is any danger for me," answered she, "and besides I can't leave,—I must keep the little pickaninnies out of mischief while Stephen and Miss Isabel are teaching the older children. I'm not afraid, but I'll tell Stephen what you say. I hope—oh, I hope there isn't going to be any trouble!" She looked at him anxiously. "Can't you use your influence to persuade them that poor Stephen means no harm?"

"I don't know," answered Ralph, looking away. He was annoyed at the way Theresa identified herself with the colored population, and he was distinctly aware that he had not used his influence so far in any such direction.

"You could do a great deal for my people if you would give them just a little encouragement," added Theresa, in a low voice. Ralph, looking at her, noticed that her eyes were suffused, and her cheek was flushed as she looked sorrowfully across the fields.

"I wish you wouldn't concern yourself so much about their affairs," he said, in a vexed tone. "It never comes to any good. It only makes trouble between the races. I reckon we shall have a race war down here some day, and a lot of them will be killed!"

Theresa stared at him with horror-stricken eyes.

"Wouldn't you use your influence to prevent *that*?"

"Certainly I should," he answered, emphatically but crossly. "I should do all in my power to prevent it. I've reorganized the Perryville Volunteers, and if I see any sign of trouble I'll telephone for them right away. I promise you to look after that."

"And they would protect my people, too, would they?" she asked, anxiously.

"Why always 'your people'? Of course—I shall have no rioting and bloodshed in this neighborhood, I promise you. But it distresses me to see you grieving and worrying yourself to death over these creatures,—in every way your inferiors. What has become of the white blood you used to be so proud of?"

"I have no white blood that counts—it is dishonest blood," said Theresa, looking down, while the blood she disclaimed dyed her cheeks scarlet. Ralph raised his hand impetuously.

"Some day you will think differently,—and you will think better of me, I hope. I have changed my ideas on many subjects,—everything in life looks different to me now. I have a right to my own happiness and so have you. I can't say any more now— But in the North, Theresa——"

"North or South,—does it make any difference? I have chosen my lot, Mr. Aikens, and I must abide by it. God chose yours for you when He made you white. The races

were meant to be separate—I believe that—I must believe it. Ah—let me go!”

She tore herself away and rushed into the cabin. Shutting the door hastily she sank into a chair and buried her face in her hands. In a few minutes she arose with a sigh, and dried her eyes. Then seeing that it was growing late, she set to work to build a wood fire in the outer cabin, for it was nearly time for supper, and her grandfather and Lemuel would soon be in from the fields.

CHAPTER XXII

THERESA discovered the next day that the blacks were already aware of the agitation among the poor whites.

The mulatto called Lou Lemons, having heard that a disturbance was brewing in the neighborhood, had left Perryville and was now preparing to lead the blacks to victory. Of all excitements he loved a race war best. The mere fact of his arrival lent a bitter animosity to the brooding discontent of the white farmers. Stephen went to the belligerent Lemons and begged him to leave the neighborhood. He was sure that his presence was doing more harm than good; but Lou replied that he had as good a right to stay there as Stephen, and he defied him to point to any act or word of his which had increased the agitation.

One fact, however, soon became apparent,

and caused Stephen grave alarm; the school was guarded every night by a band of armed negroes, and there was further evidence that these men were secretly drilling in the use of fire-arms, and were familiar with watch-words, signals and muster calls, all of which were passed from one to the other in secrecy.

Stephen called a number of the field-hands together and told them firmly that he would give up the school if they continued to patrol it; that it was the height of folly to tempt the whites in this manner to an attack; that he would rather take steps to preserve the peace than to save his life if it were in danger, which he did not believe. The whites of the South had ceased long since to burn schoolhouses. They were reconciled to the sight of the "educated nigger," and the better class were even proud of the colored schools, and would certainly protect him if he called upon them for aid.

After an exciting debate, they agreed to cease the patrol on condition that a dozen of them should be permitted to sleep in the building

at night, to which Stephen reluctantly consented. They came late, slept on the floor with a blanket apiece to cover them, and departed in the early morning to work in the fields. He hoped fervently that the presence of the night guard was not known to his white neighbors. At any rate no attack was made on the building, and as several weeks passed without any disturbance, he had reason to believe that the excitement was dying out.

Ralph Aikens called again one day at the Anderson cabin to see Theresa. He had a piece of news for her, but he found only Isabel at home. Theresa, she told him, was visiting some of the cabins. She had a class of grown women with whom she talked in the afternoon—about domestic matters.

Ralph looked his dissatisfaction.

“Some of our old women say Theresa has a black heart under her white skin,” observed Isabel, with a wicked smile.

“Why do you repeat such nonsense?” cried Ralph, in great vexation. “Tell me, why is she always away when I want to see her?”

"We have our work to do for our people,—we are very busy always," said Isabel, coldly. Ralph paused and looked at her critically.

"Whom do you mean by 'our people'? It must be that you love black folks better than white."

"I do," said Isabel, calmly.

"No law but your own choice keeps you from association with the whites. Our laws recognize a limit to the transmission of negro blood through a remote inheritance, and you have certainly passed that limit. You and Theresa don't need to hug to yourselves their disqualifications."

"I have a mother and two sisters—darker. Would you enter paradise if you had to leave all whom you love behind?"

"Paradise!"—he exclaimed in a low voice, while he looked at her with brilliant eyes,—
"Paradise is any spot in the world where a man can live in wedlock,—*honorable wedlock*—mind you—with the woman he loves, whether it's North, South, East or West." He looked away after making this irrelevant statement,

and gazed toward the North with a rapt expression as if his heart were full of a secret joy.

There was silence for a moment. Isabel looked at him fixedly while her expression softened.

"My poor little friend!" she exclaimed. He knew that she referred to Theresa.

"I hope you will repeat my exact words to her," continued the pale young man in a whisper. "She flies from me as if she had reason to dread me. I want her to know my unalterable determination,—to give up home, social ties, everything, for her sake. I couldn't have done it in my mother's lifetime,—but now I am my own master. I want her to know the exalted respect I have for her. Mind you, I said '*honorable wedlock*'—you won't forget that?"

"I shall not," said Isabel, looking also pale and solemn, and very ill at ease. The secret of Theresa's marriage was not hers to impart and it weighed heavily on her conscience at that moment.

Ralph soon afterward took his departure, but not before he had communicated the news which had been his excuse for calling. Dreadful to relate—he said, mockingly—a charge of theft had been brought against the demagogue schoolmaster by a white woman known as Sallie Willoughby who lived near Thomas' Mills. It was said that she had sworn out a warrant for his arrest.

Isabel repeated to Theresa her conversation with Ralph as she had promised. The girl said nothing in reply. She turned away quickly to hide her emotion, and Isabel did not refer to the subject again in her presence. She repeated it also to Stephen, and told him of Sallie Willoughby's charge of theft.

"That settles it," was his only comment—he was not referring to Sallie Willoughby. He left the schoolroom hastily and Isabel heard him pacing up and down the hall-way upstairs. He tried to make himself believe that he rejoiced over the happy fate that was now to be Theresa's. The burden of a degraded race was to be lifted from her young

shoulders—for the matter of a divorce could be easily arranged by the lawyers. It could be easily proved that the marriage had been brought about by compulsion, in which he had exercised unfairly the authority of a teacher. He would rejoice, he would rejoice—but it was with haggard cheek and hollow eye.

He now wanted to break the formal tie which bound Theresa to him as quickly as possible, and he resolved to consult a Perryville lawyer the following day. Before he had time to take this step, he was informed that the warrant had already been issued for his arrest, and he would not be permitted to leave the neighborhood.

Sallie Willoughby was a woman of doubtful character, whose husband had left her after a career of illicit whisky distilling. She had sent for Stephen a few days before to discuss with him some repairs to her house. He had called unwillingly and found two rough-looking characters sitting on her front steps. They told him to go to the kitchen door, which he did, and was admitted. Mrs. Wil-

Willoughby showed him her leaking roof and broken windows, and as he started to leave she uttered a shriek and ran screaming into the yard. The two men appeared from the front of the house and demanded the cause of her alarm. Pointing to the negro-teacher the woman cried out that he had tried to rob her of her savings. The men rushed at Stephen who would have fared badly, but at that moment half-a-dozen field-hands dashed forward from some unknown quarter and drove the men away with their rakes and spades. Unknown to Stephen they had silently dropped their work in the field and followed him to the house, suspecting that danger lurked therein for their beloved "perfessor."

Theresa and Isabel, at the suggestion of Wesley Anderson, went together to beseech Ralph Aikens to offer bail for Stephen's appearance at court. He consented amiably, and the two women left his house delighted with the success of their mission.

A few days later, Stephen and Ralph, Mrs. Willoughby and her two witnesses met at

the office of the magistrate. After the hearing, Ralph was about to sign his name to the bond when the magistrate tapped him on the arm and drew him aside.

"Didn't I hear you say that this was a trumped-up charge?" he whispered. Ralph nodded.

"I reckon you want this fixed for your 'commodation, eh? I'll name a big fine for his failing to keep the peace, and 'stead o' his bail-bond you offer to pay the fine, provided he'll work out the amount on your plantation. He's a steady lookin' fellow and you'll git a good hand for nothing. See?"

Ralph swore an oath of rage and disgust.

"Finish up this business the proper way and keep your tricks to yourself. When I want a man's labor I pay for it."

"It's done often enough,—and it lets 'em off easy. You needn't parade your virtue in this office. I know what's right as well as you, and what's within the law, though I ain't no d——d lawyer."

Sullenly he led the way back to the front

office and Ralph signed his name without deigning to glance again at the mortified official.

Stephen sat on the bench absorbed in painful thoughts. The situation was full of humiliation. He thanked Ralph Aikens briefly and with a kind of sternness in his manner as they left the office. Hatred such as only the Anglo-Saxon can feel for the "barbarian" who has wronged him, filled his heart. He remembered that the planter's son had circumvented all his plans for the improvement of his poor people. The fact that Ralph was the leader in opposition had given all the encouragement needed to the ignorant whites. In Stephen's eyes Ralph was the barbarian—the savage.

Young Aikens, however, recognized Stephen indifferently as the negro he had thrown down the stairway in Perryville. He recalled the incident without the slightest ill-will.

Wearily Stephen returned to the schoolhouse and threw himself on a little single bed in a loft above one of the schoolrooms.

He slept heavily for some hours. When he awoke it was dark, and a winter moon was shining through the small window.

He heard some one knocking outside. Steps followed as if one of the blacks who were on guard below had gone to open the door. A woman's voice, low, hurried and agitated reached his ear. Theresa was calling him by name.

CHAPTER XXIII

ISABEL and Theresa had been visiting some of the poorer colored folk in their cabins. It was late as they returned through the moss-hung woods near the Aikens plantation; the sun had set, and gloomy shadows were gathering below the trees.

They heard voices near by, and stopped to listen. To the right, beyond a thick clump of bushes, there was a hut occupied by a shiftless white family. It was from this direction that the voices came; they were the tones of men in passionate excitement. Isabel pushed her way a short distance into the underbrush, and stood still to listen. Between twigs, evergreens and trunks of trees she caught a glimpse of the hut now encircled by a crowd of men. The sight made her heart stand still, for every one of them carried a musket. Their hoarse, angry voices, their threats and

oaths burst forth into howls of rage, reminding her of a pack of starving wolves assembled on a winter's night to bay at the moon in the absence of the prey for which their stomachs hungered.

The wind brought to her ear several words which revealed the purpose of the meeting. They were laying plans to surprise the school building and capture the negro teacher. His temporary release from custody until the day of his trial they chose to regard as a miscarriage of justice.

Grievous reports were maddening them. Although the few blacks who knew of Theresa's marriage had faithfully kept the secret, yet some gossip concerning Stephen's interest in her was already afloat. Again, there had come to the ears of these white men a whisper that young Aikens had noticed and admired the fair girl,—and then came the story of Stephen's "insult" to young Aikens and of the attempted lynching at Perryville. Ah! he had escaped his just deserts that time,—the black rascal—and as a result, he was now

engaged in decoying the attractive maid beyond the reach of Ralph's influence. He was filling the minds of ignorant field-hands with ridiculous notions that might enable them some day to compete with white men. He was scheming for negro domination—paying no attention when commanded to leave the neighborhood. He was a vile fellow—unfit for the position of schoolmaster; respectable “nigger” teachers were all right in their way, but not this sort. He was dishonest like all “niggers,” of course; was he not already accused of theft?

And was it only theft that he was guilty of? Had he not been seen to fix his eyes on Mrs. Willoughby herself—with heaven knows what villainy in his thoughts? And yet the law had refused to hold fast this bold schemer—this black plotter against the honor of white womanhood! Ah! they would protect the white womanhood of the South, with their lives if need be,—yes, with their lives—their lives!

They would take the law into their own

hands; it was evident that Ralph Aikens knew not the danger of turning loose this pretence of a pedagogue—why, in another day, he might commit some other awful crime and disappear—and the law would never be able to lay its hands on him!

This was the line if not the exact language of their arguments. It was unanswerable—if all the premises are admitted,—and there was none to dispute them. The “honor of white womanhood” finished the business; it would justify them in the eyes of the whole country.

Isabel listened in horror, and then drew back as quietly as possible, hoping that the cracking of dry branches and the rustling of her skirts would not reveal her presence to the infuriated band. As she regained the road, she clutched Theresa's arm.

“They're getting ready for a lynching—What shall we do?”

“Let's run to Mr. Aikens' house. He promised to stop them,—he said he wouldn't allow bloodshed. Oh, run, run—Miss Isabel, we must be quick!”

Clasping hands the two women fled through the woods like frightened deer. They did not take time to speak; hardly in fact did they breathe. Their feet sped over the ground with extraordinary swiftness, but rapidly as they ran, the minutes seemed like hours before they came in sight of Colonel Aikens' house. Isabel stopped suddenly with her hand pressed to her side.

"I can go no further—" she panted. "It kills me to run like this."

"Do you go and warn Lemuel and grandpa," said Theresa, breathlessly, "and I will see Mr. Aikens. I can run as if I had wings," and on she flew alone.

Ralph was on the porch as she approached and he hastened to meet her. Theresa told him in a few words what they had seen and heard in the woods.

"You promised—you promised!" she panted, imploringly.

"I know all about their plans," he answered, "and I've telephoned for the Volunteers. Six of the men have consented to help

ment—understanding—between you and this Stephen?”

“No—no!” she cried, with her hand on her breast. Ah, if she but dared tell him the truth! But would he then save Stephen?

“He is nothing to you? Swear it!”

“Nothing—he is nothing to me.” Her voice shook,—it rang in her ears like a false note. Had she lied? No, she would not lie! She would clear herself—and she would save Stephen. She drew back and straightened up proudly on the horse’s back.

“I know nothing of love,—nothing—except love for my race. You can’t understand that—you never will—but it is a passion with me as deep as the sea—as holy as the Church of God,—far deeper and holier than a man’s love! Stephen can raise my people; so I respect—and esteem him—and his life is valuable to me on that account—but beyond that, he is like a complete stranger. What do I care for the stranger within your gates whom I have not seen? That is how much I care for Stephen—how much I care for any man’s love!” Her

head was high but the hand she had lifted fell softly on the horse's neck. Ralph looked at her narrowly.

"Or mine either!" he added, and his head drooped. He rubbed his cheek against the arched neck of the horse. Presently he raised his head, his dark blue eyes full of a tender wistfulness,—and again he laid hold of her hand.

"I am going into danger for your sake—to please you. I am risking my reputation—my popularity, I mean, and I have a lot of friends—to gratify a whim of yours—to chase away your foolish fears for this pedagogue. I claim a reward—kiss me, Theresa,—I know you don't love me, so I won't think anything of it—kiss me, sweetheart."

But Theresa turned her face to the sky and addressed the unseen stars.

"You don't believe what I say,—you don't believe that my heart has only one passion? I am not made for love, I have a 'mission,' and when I think of it I could die for it! Yes,—I think I am nothing but a spirit—a ghost—and

no woman!" Her voice fell coldly sweet on the evening air, as if it came down from a great height.

"No—you are no woman—you are a kind of Joan of Arc to-night. Be a little human—be kind!" he entreated, "I will not let you go until you do!"

She looked down upon him, gravely,—and he was struck with the pale exaltation that was in her look.

"God—you are beautiful!" broke from him impulsively.

She hardly seemed to hear his words—being absorbed apparently in a struggle with another self. She stretched out her hand until it touched his forehead—and he stepped nearer.

"Never think of me as unkind," she whispered—her eyelids drooping while she leaned slowly toward him—stooping until her lips touched his forehead.

"I will never think of you any way but one," he answered, brokenly—disappointed because she had withdrawn herself so quickly

to gather up the reins. Already she had shaken herself free of him, and was urging her horse forward.

But in a moment she stopped and turned in her saddle with a beseeching radiant look and outstretched arms. Ralph sprang quickly to her side. Again the swaying figure bent over him; if he had not supported her, she would have fallen from the horse. He felt her trembling within his arms: from head to foot she was in a quiver of feeling—and his own heart was full of a wild joy.

“Theresa—you love me!” he cried in exultation.

“If I had been your slave—*your slave*—” she whispered in his ear, “I would have obeyed your commands with joy—but now it is different—different!”

“You mean in the good old days?” he answered, looking at her in wonder. “But why should it be so different now? If you love me, Theresa, you will not ask me to sacrifice my career—my home—everything—will you, dearest? Love will bind us securely, and need

we care for what goes on outside of our little world?"

"I am going—to Stephen; I had almost forgotten—to warn him——"

She spoke abruptly—wildly—as if awakening suddenly from a dream. She dragged herself from him in passionate haste, absorbed apparently in a new thought. Again the horse moved forward, leaving Ralph standing alone—the wind drying his cheek that had been wet with her tears.

He sprang hastily on the other horse which was standing near, and overtook her. As they reached the crossroads, Ralph observed briefly that it was time to meet the train. He then left her with repeated injunctions to return promptly as soon as her errand was accomplished. He realized that she was again far removed from him.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Theresa made her way rather slowly after parting from Ralph, her "Joan of Arc" air falling from her like a cloak as soon as he was out of sight. She clung to the pommel—a woeful, sobbing creature,—an image of sorrow on horseback. Through her grief shone only the light of her unperformed mission. The thought of it gradually calmed her. She was timid and she did not venture to urge the high stepping animal to increase his speed. Once he came to a full stop to eye a broken-down wagon by the roadside, his ears pointed forward with every evidence of fear and distrust. Theresa in anticipation of a sudden movement that might dislodge her from his back, guided him with a trembling hand down a left-hand road which led also to Thomas' Mills. She urged him to walk a little faster and clung to his mane with one hand and to the pommel with the other. If Ralph had

only permitted her to walk, instead of seating her upon this majestic brute, with his unaccountable suspicions of every known and familiar object on the road!

It was late when she reached the school-house and quite dark save for the moonlight. She slid off the horse and knocked hastily. Her approach had been observed from the window and the door was opened without delay.

Theresa told the men who gathered quickly around her all she knew of the mob's intentions, and of Ralph's precautions and promised aid. Stephen came downstairs and listened quietly. He seemed gratified at what Ralph had done and felt sure there would be little trouble after the arrival of the Volunteers. Then he urged Theresa to return immediately to the cabin, where he knew she would be safe under the protection of the guard Ralph had promised her. He preferred she should ride back as she came, and assured her the horse must be safe and gentle if Ralph had placed her upon his back.

Reluctantly she consented to be lifted back into the saddle.

"It's colder riding than walking," she complained. "Lend me something to wrap 'round my shoulders."

Stephen brought out a light overcoat which he buttoned across her breast, and she pulled down her knitted woolen cap close over her ears. Stephen ran beside the horse a little way and advised Theresa to keep him going at a brisk pace. She assured him that she had now lost her fear of the animal and could make her way alone. He left her at the turn of the road in obedience to her earnest entreaties, and she forsook the main road for a short cut back to the Aikens' plantation. Bravely she jerked the reins and discovered to her satisfaction that the swifter motion was not at all disturbing to her equilibrium. The rocking pace of the horse increased into a swinging gallop which pleased her. She leaned forward to pat the outstretched neck, and as she did so the long folds of the light overcoat swung backward in the wind. The

iron-clad hoofs clattered over a short wooden bridge and after horse and rider had passed, a dozen dark forms rose to their feet from the gully below.

“That’s him—” cried several voices, and three men started in pursuit. Suddenly one of them stopped and leveled his rifle. There was a sharp report, and then a volley of shots followed from the men in the rear. Some of them were good marksmen. There was a scream and the figure on the galloping horse swayed from side to side. It fell heavily to the ground as the frightened horse bounded forward.

Meanwhile from the opposite direction came a band of horsemen who struck spurs to their horses and dashed forward to the rescue. They were the six Perryville Volunteers with Ralph Aikens in the lead. Three of them dropped from their horses beside the prostrate form of Theresa. Ralph raised her in his arms and with the assistance of a comrade bore her in the direction of the schoolhouse.

Ralph gave brief directions to one of his

friends to go for a doctor. The others started in pursuit of the murderers, who were now running for their lives. The two men carrying between them the motionless form of the young girl, at last reached the schoolhouse. As the door opened, they staggered forward and laid her on a low bench in one of the classrooms. A wail of grief rose from the negroes; many of them began to sob aloud.

Ralph called for a light and quickly all the lamps belonging to the school were brought into the room. Ralph and Stephen bent over her to discover the extent of the bullet wounds. There was little blood flowing to guide them.

Ralph sitting on the bench held her in his arms. Her black hair was spread over his knees; her dress was torn open from the throat. He gazed fixedly into the white face and smoothed her hair back from the temples.

Stephen on his knees vainly attempted to apply a bandage to her shoulder. Her eyes were closed and she was breathing heavily. Ralph tried to bring her back to consciousness by calling her name,

The eyes of the young girl finally opened wide in a prolonged stare into his face. He thought she failed to recognize him, and in a broken voice he assured her that it was he, Ralph Aikens, who held her and no other. Her lips parted and she turned her head to one side. Her eyes were seeking Stephen's face, and he bent his head close to hers as she seemed about to speak. Her lips moved with a great effort. Then two words reached his ear distinctly:

"Take me." Stephen hesitated,—and she spoke again more clearly than before,—

"Hold me, Stephen—in your arms." He looked inquiringly at Ralph who was still mechanically smoothing her forehead with his hand. The young black said to him huskily,—

"She wants me to hold her."

"Take her," said Ralph, unsteadily. Gently the burden was shifted from one pair of arms to the other; the young white man, looking dazed as well as broken-hearted, sat down on the bench and folded his empty arms. The other seemed to be conscious of his misery and

troubled by it. Raising his head he said in a hoarsely voice:

"She is my wife." Ralph stared vacantly, but gave no sign of surprise. He continued to sit with folded arms and bent head.

A convulsive tremor passed over Stephen's dark face. He composed his countenance by a violent effort of will because Theresa's eyes were looking into his.

"Poor Stephen!" she whispered, distinctly. Then her eyes closed. He spoke her name in a whisper,—adding two tender words to it,—the first words of love he had ever spoken to her. Her eyelids quivered faintly as if she understood him.

Ralph Aikens sprang suddenly to his feet and knelt beside her.

"You have turned back to your own race, but I forgive you,—Won't you speak to me, Theresa? One word? Won't you look at me? You belong to my race too, can you forget that?"

He kissed her hands now wet with his tears. There was no answer.

Stephen heard without heeding this passionate appeal. The words reached his ears, but not his intelligence. His whole soul was concentrated on the still face of the young girl; he was watching, waiting, and hoping against hope for a return of consciousness. The thrill of exquisite joy that shot through him a moment ago at the proof of her loyalty to him, was now strangled in the agonizing thought that she had passed from him forever.

A pistol shot sounded in his ear and he felt a stinging blow on his shoulder. Some one had shot him through the window.

"They must know I want to die too," he thought. "But I must live to avenge her death. Dear God—let me live long enough to kill one—*one* only—it is all I ask——"

Soon afterward he fainted, and then he must have slept.

Stephen awoke to find the body of Theresa removed from his arms and Ralph bending over him. He was fastening on a bandage securely.

"He has his work to do—but what have I?" Ralph said, half aloud.

Stephen sat up and passed his hand across his forehead—trying to recall what had happened. He was conscious of a great change within him. Resentment had died out; revenge was no longer what he thirsted for. Some strange metamorphosis had taken place. Had the white soul been recalled by its Maker and another sent to take its place? Or had it merely succumbed to its environment and changed its nature? Could such a surrender be made by the proud Anglo-Saxon? I do not know; but neither do I know how to account for the perfect reconciliation with existing conditions of which Stephen was now supremely conscious. He knew earth could never torture him again. For he could see into the distant future; he could behold the gradual evolution of his race! He saw himself as a mere speck in humanity's line of vision—now made joyous in the track of a sunbeam and again drifting into colorless tragedy on passing out of that golden path-

way. He was filled with a far-seeing patience. He answered Ralph's thought with unexpected gentleness.

"Yes, I have my work; is it your wish that I should go on with it here—in this neighborhood?"

"You shall never leave me," said Ralph, laying his hand on the other's well shoulder, and looking at him with deep affection, "but you must get well first—then, we shall do it together."

"Together?" repeated Stephen,—smiling faintly, not at Ralph but at a star that was visible through the open window. It was shining straight into his heart with a message from Theresa, he thought. Slowly it faded into the dawn.

On the day of the funeral, the people from far and near traveled in a constantly moving procession to the Anderson cabin, passing in one door and out the other to take their last look at the dead girl. Among those who stopped for a brief moment to gaze awe-

struck upon the unearthly beauty of the young, upturned face, were several shabbily-dressed white men. Their rough, bearded faces showed a shamefaced distress, if not actual grief; they removed their slouched hats, bowed their heads and stepped softly, casting sidelong, uneasy glances around the cabin and at the group of mourners—the old grandfather, the young brother and the silent, grief-stricken husband. When they emerged into the open air and sunlight, they brushed their hands across their eyes, and, without exchanging a word, they parted, each going his way alone.

One of these men passed into the woods, and followed with bent head, the narrow path that led to his home. It was a hovel no better than many that the blacks lived in; the interior was not as homelike or as neat as that of the Anderson cabin; no flowering vines climbed above the doorway; there were no curtains at the windows, and no garden plot in front of the door. A desolate squalor—more horrible because of its desolation than the squalor of

the city slums—reigned supreme over the spot.

The man stopped when he came in sight of it, and surveyed it grimly. Turning his head, he fixed his bloodshot eyes with a shudder, upon a moss-shrouded tree, from which dangled a long rope. He had thrown it himself over the bough only a few days before, with a heart full of murderous intent. But now the lust to kill had gone out of him; a passion of remorse—a new terrible anguish, as unfamiliar and as cruel as death,—was piercing him like a two-edged sword. He uttered a cry like that of a wounded animal, and lifted his clinched hands high in the air.

“God—I curse you! I curse you!” he shrieked, “for making me a murderer! I curse you because you have forgotten me—*me*, a white man, who ought to be a gran’ nobleman! I curse the South for leaving me to grow up in my ig’rance like a savage,—I curse them that sends missionaries to the blacks, but sends none to the likes o’ me. Oh, God, have mercy—have mercy on me!”

He threw himself on the ground and lay there sobbing.

From the negroes' burial ground, half a mile away, came the sound of children's voices singing, at the conclusion of the burial service:

"He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call
retreat;

He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment
seat:

Oh! be swift, my soul, to answer Him! be jubilant, my
feet!

Our God is marching on."

The forlorn creature in the woods sat up to listen. A look of superstitious fear crept into his eyes.

"They're allus a-singin' o' what their God can do. Seems like He must be bigger an' stronger 'n our God—betimes. I hear tell the battles allus went ag'in us from the day the Yanks put fo'ward them black regiments." He staggered angrily to his feet at this reflection.

"Ef we ain't got a God big enough to fight

that there God o' theirs,—there ain't no use believin' in Him anyhow."

Muttering to himself—shaking first his head, and then his fist,—the poor wretch slowly made his way to the miserable cabin.

THE END.





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